A GRIM TRAGEDY OF THE SEA WAS BEING ENACTED.

See page 139.

AIR SERVICE BOYS OVER THE ATLANTIC

OR

THE LONGEST FLIGHT ON RECORD

BY

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AUTHOR OF "AIR SERVICE BOYS FLYING FOR FRANCE,"
"AIR SERVICE BOYS OVER THE RHINE," ETC.

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AIR SERVICE BOYS OVER THE ATLANTIC

CHAPTER I

OUT FOR BUSINESS

"Look! What does that mean, Tom?"

"It means that fellow wants to ruin the Yankee plane, and perhaps finish the flier who went down with it to the ground."

"Not if we can prevent it, I say. Take a nose-dive, Tom, and leave it to me to manage the gun!"

"He isn't alone, Jack, for I saw a second skulker in the brush, I'm sure."

"We've got to drive those jackals away, no matter at what risk. Go to it, Tom, old scout!"

The big battle-plane, soaring fully two thousand feet above the earth, suddenly turned almost upside-down, so that its nose pointed at an angle close to forty-five degrees. Like a hawk plunging after its prey it sped through space, the two occupants held in their places by safety belts.

As they thus rushed downward the earth seemed as if rising to meet them. Just at the

right second Tom Raymond, by a skillful flirt of his hand, brought the Yankee fighting aircraft back to an even keel, with a beautiful gliding movement.

Immediately the steady throb of the reliable motor took up its refrain, while the buzz of the spinning propellers announced that the plane was once more being shot through space by artificial means.

The two occupants were Tom Raymond and Jack Parmly, firm friends and chums who had been like David and Jonathan in their long association. It was Tom who acted as pilot on the present occasion, while Jack took the equally important position of observer and gunner.

Both were young Americans with a natural gift in the line of aviation. They had won their spurs while serving under French leadership as members of the famous Lafayette Escadrille. The adventures they encountered at that time are related in the first book of this series, entitled: "Air Service Boys Flying For France."

After America entered the war, like all other adventurous young Yankee fliers, the two Air Service Boys offered their services to their own country and joined one of the new squadrons then being formed.

Here the two youths won fresh laurels, and both were well on the way to be recognized

"aces" by the time Pershing's army succeeded in fighting its way through the nests of machine-gun traps that infested the great Argonne Forest.

It was in the autumn of the victory year, 1918, and the German armies were being pushed back all along the line from Switzerland to the sea. Under the skillful direction of Marshal Foch, the Allies had been dealing telling and rapid blows, now here, now there.

To-day it was the British that struck; the day afterward the French advanced their front; and next came the turn of the Americans under Pershing. Everywhere the discouraged and almost desperate Huns were being forced in retreat, continually drawing closer to the border.

Already the sanguine young soldiers from overseas were talking of spending the winter on the Rhine. Some even went so far as to predict that their next Christmas dinner would be eaten in Berlin. It was no idle boast, for they believed it might be so, because victory was in the very air.

So great was the distress of the Hun forces that it was believed Marshal Foch had laid a vast trap and was using the fresh and enthusiastic Yankees to drive a dividing wedge between Ludendorff's two armies, when a colossal surrender must inevitably follow.

The whole world now knows that this complete break-up of the Teutons was avoided solely by their demand for an armistice, with an agreement on terms that were virtually a surrender—absolute in connection with their navy.

Tom and Jack had displayed considerable ability in carrying out their work, and could no longer be regarded as novices. Each of them had for some time been anticipating promotion, and hoped to return home with the rank of lieutenant at least.

They had been entrusted with a number of especially dangerous missions, and had met with considerable success in putting these through. Like most other ambitious young fliers, they hoped soon to merit the title of "ace," when they could point to at least six proven victories over rival pilots, with that number of planes sent down in combat.

On the present occasion they had sallied out "looking for trouble," as Jack put it; which, in so many words, meant daring any Hun flier to meet them and engage in a duel among the clouds.

Other planes they could see cruising toward the northwest, and also flying in an easterly direction; but as a rule these bore signs of being Allies' machines, and in all probability had Yankee pilots manning them.

Apparently the Hun airmen were otherwise

employed. They seemed to prefer venturing out after nightfall, gathering in force, and often taking a strange satisfaction in bombing some Red Cross hospital, where frequently their own wounded were being treated alongside the American doughboys.

During the weeks that the Americans were battling in the great Argonne Forest the two Air Service Boys had contributed to the best of their ability to each daily drive. Again and again had they taken part in such dangerous work as fell to the portion of the aviators. Their activities at that time are set down in the fifth volume of this series, entitled: "Air Service Boys Flying For Victory."

Frequently they had found themselves in serious trouble, and their escapes were both numerous and thrilling. Through it all they had been highly favored, since neither of them had thus far met with a serious accident. Numbers of their comrades had been registered as "missing," or were known to have been shot down and lost.

It was no unusual thing a few days after a flier had gone out and failed to return at evening, for a Hun pilot to sail over and drop a note telling that he had fallen in combat, and was buried at a certain place with his grave so marked that it could be easily found.

There seemed to be a vein of old-time chivalry

among the German airmen even up to the very last, such as had not marked any other branch of their fighting forces, certainly not the navy. And the Americans made it a point to return this courtesy whenever an opportunity arose.

Tom was proud of his ability to execute that difficult feat known as a "nose-dive." More than once it had extricated him from a "pocket" into which he found himself placed by circumstances, with three or more enemy planes circling around and bombarding him from their active guns.

At such times the only hope of the attacked pilot lay in his ability to drop down as if his machine had received a fatal blow and when once far below the danger point again to recover an even keel.

Jack never doubted what the result would be, having the utmost confidence in his comrade. The wind rushed past his ears as they pitched downward; and just when objects on the ground loomed up suggestively there was the expected sudden shift of the lever, a consequent change in the pointing of the plane's nose, and then they found themselves on the new level, with the motor again humming merrily.

Jack was on the alert and quickly discovered the object that just then enlisted their whole attention. As he had suspected when using the glasses from the higher level, it was a Yankee

bomber that lay partly hidden among the bushes where it had fallen. He could easily see the Indian head marking the broken wing.

The pilot was sitting near by as though unable to make a run for it, although Jack imagined he must suspect the approach of danger, for he gripped something that glinted in the sunlight in his right hand. It was, of course, an automatic pistol.

Looking hastily around Jack glimpsed the creeping figures of the two Germans who, having seen the fall of the Yankee plane, must have come out from some place of concealment and were bent on finishing the pilot, or at least taking him prisoner. They had almost reached a point where it would have been possible for them to open fire on the wounded American.

Jack looked in vain for any second figure near the fallen plane. If the pilot had had an observer with him, which was most likely, considering the fact that he had been using a bombing machine, the latter must have been dispatched for relief some time before.

"There they are, Tom!" burst from the one who crouched close to the machine gun, and pointing as he spoke. "Swoop down and let me give them a volley!"

The Huns evidently realized what was coming, and feared that their intended victim might

after all escape their hands. Even as Jack spoke there came a shot from below, and a bullet went screaming past close to the ears of the Air Service Boys. It was followed by a second and a third in quick succession.

What the marksmen hoped to do was either to kill the pilot or else to strike some vulnerable part of the engine, thus disabling it and wrecking the plane. Those were chances which had to be taken continually; but as a rule the rapidity of flight rendered them almost negligible.

Jack waited no longer. The two men were about to fling themselves behind friendly trees, and but a small chance remained that he might catch them before they were able to shield themselves by these close-by trunks.

Jack, in his most energetic fashion, commenced to spray the vicinity with a shower of leaden missiles. The chatter of the machine gun drowned any cries from the two men below. The Yankee plane swooped past the spot where the injured pilot still sat at bay, ready to sell his life dearly if the worst came.

CHAPTER II

THE RESCUE

THE rat-tat-tat of gunfire suddenly ceased. Jack could no longer cover the spot where the two Huns were hiding behind the tree-trunks, and consequently it would be a sheer waste of ammunition to continue firing.

But already Tom had commenced to circle, and soon they would be swooping down upon the scene from another direction. Jack kept on the alert, so as to note quickly any possible movement of the enemy.

Again he poured a hot fire on the place where he knew the Germans were cowering, tearing up the ground with a storm of bullets as though it had been freshly harrowed. But the sturdy trees baffled him once more.

"Nothing doing, Tom!" he called out, vexed. "We've got to drop down and go it on foot if we want to save that pilot!"

"I see a good landing place!" announced the other almost instantly.

"Great luck! get busy then!"

The ground chanced to be unusually smooth, and the plane, after bumping along for a short distance, came to a stand. Meanwhile, both young fliers had succeeded in releasing themselves from their safety belts.

Together they jumped to the ground and started on a run toward the spot where those crouching figures had last been seen. Of course, the Huns must already know of their landing and would be ready to defend themselves, if not to attack; but, nothing daunted by this possibility, the pair pushed ahead through bushes and past trees.

"Better separate, and attack 'em from two different angles, hadn't we, Tom?" panted Jack presently, as a shot was heard and something clipped a twig from a bush within a foot of his hand.

"Take the left, and I'll look after the right!" snapped out Tom.

Both were armed with automatic pistols, for airmen can never tell when their lives may depend upon their ability to defend themselves, and so seldom make a flight without some such weapon in their possession.

"They're on the run!" cried Jack, in a tone of disgust; for he had really hoped to have a further brush with the skulking enemy.

He sent several shots in their direction whenever he caught glimpses of the bounding figures, but without much hope of striking either of them. Still, they had undoubtedly accomplished the business in hand, which was to save the Yankee pilot.

"He's over this way, Jack," observed Tom, moving to the right still further, after being joined by his comrade. "I can see the opening where he must have struck. The Hun flier didn't bother to follow him down and find out if he'd made a count. He may have been here for some time."

"I see him now," continued Jack eagerly. "And it strikes me there's something familiar about his looks. Yes, we've met that pilot before, Tom. It's Lieutenant Colin Beverly, one of the cleverest Yankee aces of the newer squad."

The aviator had already discovered the Air Service Boys' presence. Doubtless all that had occurred had been noted by him as he sat, waiting for anything that might happen; and the swoop of the American plane, as well as Jack's firing, had of course told him help was near.

"He's waving his hand to us," continued Jack, answering in kind.

"Keep your gun ready for business," warned the other, inclined to be more cautious. "There may be other Huns prowling around, because

we're not far from their lines, you understand."

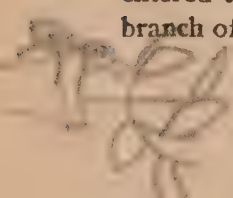
A minute afterwards they reached the pilot of the wrecked bomber.

"Hello, fellows!" was his familiar greeting, as he thrust a hand out toward them. "Glad to see you, all right. They were after me, just as I suspected. My observer was wounded in the arm, but went for help. As for me, save for a few scratches, I made the fall in great luck. But I'm still crippled from that other accident. Just got out of hospital a week ago. They tried to keep me from going up, but I'd have died only for the permission."

Colin Beverly they knew to be one of the liveliest fliers then serving in the American ranks. He had gained a name for daring second to none. Early in his service he had won a reputation, and was already a double ace; which meant that he was officially credited with at least twelve victories over enemy fliers.

Tom and Jack had met him a number of times previously, and there had always been a strong attraction between the three. Lieutenant Beverly was one of fortune's favorites in so far as worldly riches went, since he had a million at least to his credit, it was said.

He had enlisted as soon as the United States entered the war, and had chosen aviation as his branch of the service, since it offered his venture-



some, almost reckless, spirit a chance for action. He had had numerous escapes so narrow that his friends began to believe some magical charm must protect him.

As he had mentioned when speaking to them on their arrival, his closest call had sent him to the hospital with a fractured bone in his left leg; and even when discharged as cured he really should not have returned to the harness; only, those in authority found it difficult to keep such an energetic soul in check.

"Those chaps will come back with more of their kind, I reckon," Tom remarked. "They've made up their minds to get you, Lieutenant, and when a Hun is bent on a thing he keeps on trying. We can take you along with us."

"I hate to desert the bus," complained the other, giving his wrecked plane a wry look. "But then what's the use of sticking it out? Chances are we'll be through the mess before they ever get it in fighting trim again. Yes, I'll go along, boys, if you'll lend me a shoulder. Gave that game leg another little knock in falling; but then, I might have broken my neck, so I'm thankful."

"The Beverly luck again!" chuckled Jack, at which the intrepid flier nodded with kindling eyes.

"Getting to believe I can carry anything

through I care to tackle, for a fact, fellows," he remarked, with the same amazing confidence that had taken him along so many times in a whirlwind of success.

They ranged alongside, and he leaned on Tom's arm as he limped off, giving no further heed to the mass of damaged engine, crumpled wood, bent steel guys, and torn canvas that had once been a powerful bombing plane.

Jack kept in readiness to meet any attack that might spring up, though they had reason to believe the Huns had temporarily withdrawn from the field of action.

"Your friend Harry Leroy dropped in to see me while I was laid up, Raymond," remarked the lieutenant, with a broad grin, as he saw how his words caused the color to flash into the bronzed cheeks of the other.

"Haven't seen Harry for some time," Tom replied, his eyes twinkling with pleasure; "but I heard of you through his sister. Nellie said you were the hardest patient she'd ever tackled, because you kept fretting to get out and be at work again."

"Yes, Miss Leroy was my nurse for a week, and I think I improved more under her care than at any other time. She's a fine girl, Raymond."

"Sure thing, Lieutenant. I ought to know," came the unabashed answer. "I've known Nel-

lie for some time, and that was always my opinion. We're good friends all right."

"H'm! I guess you must be," chuckled the other. "I wish you could have seen her look when I mentioned that I knew you well, and liked you in the bargain. I kept talking Tom Raymond a full streak just to watch the blushes play over her face and the light shine in her eyes. Raymond, you're a lucky dog."

"Here's our plane, and we'll soon be able to get going with such a smooth bit of ground ahead," Tom hastened to remark, though it was easy to see that what the other said had thrilled him.

"All aboard!" sang out Jack, after a last quick look around. "No Huns in sight, as far as I can see."

The ascent was easily made, for, as Tom had said, they were favored with an unusually level stretch of ground beyond, over which the plane rolled decently until the pilot switched his lever and they started to soar. From some place close by an unseen enemy commenced to fire again, but without success.

Once fully on their way, the danger faded out of sight. Again they were spinning through space, with the earth fading below them.

"Back home, Tom?" called out Jack, and the pilot nodded an affirmative.

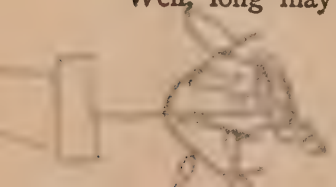
Swiftly they sped, and presently were dropping back to earth at the spot whence their outgoing flight had started. Here there were evidences of bustle, with planes coming and going all the while. Couriers could be seen on horses or motorcycles speeding away with important news to be sent from the nearest field telephone station in touch with division headquarters.

The landing was made without incident, though curious glances were cast in their direction. Many knew that Tom and his chum had made their ascent without a third passenger, and the presence of Lieutenant Beverly announced that some sort of tragedy of the air had occurred.

A number of other pilots swooped down upon them to learn the particulars. As usual they were inclined to be jocular, and greeted the limping Beverly with a volley of questions, as well as remarks concerning that "luck" of which he had talked.

"They can't get you, no matter how they try, Beverly," one called out.

"Another machine to the scrap-heap!" laughingly observed the most celebrated of Yankee aces, slapping Colin on the shoulder. "Makes an even dozen for you I understand. Planes may come and planes may go but you go on forever. Well, long may you wave, old chap! Here's



wishing you luck. So the boys picked you up, did they? Nice work, all right."

"Just in time, too," confessed Beverly, "because there were some Huns on the way to finish me that had to be chased off."

Tom had been noticing something which he thought a bit strange. It was a way Lieutenant Beverly had of looking at him curiously, as if deciding something in his mind which had suddenly gripped him.

"Is there anything else we can do for you, Lieutenant?" he finally asked, when they had left the bevy of pilots and mechanics behind and were heading toward their quarters; for Tom wished to see the other comfortable before he and Jack ascended once more.

"I don't believe there is—at present," the other slowly replied. "But this accidental meeting may develop into something worth while; that is, if you chaps would care to join me in a sensational flight."

At hearing these words Jack began to show a sudden interest.

"If you know anything about us, Lieutenant!" he exclaimed eagerly, "you ought to understand that we've always been willing to tackle any job coming our way."

"This one," continued the other gravely,

"promises to be an unusually dangerous enterprise that if successful, will be sure to win the crew of the big bombing plane tremendous honors and perhaps rapid advancement."

"You're only exciting us more and more by saying that," said Tom. "Suppose you explain what it is, and then we could decide whether we'd want to join you or not."

"My sentiments exactly," added Jack.

Lieutenant Beverly looked from one face to the other. He seemed to be mentally weighing the chances of his ever being able to run across two more promising candidates for the honor of sharing his secret than the pair of ambitious lads then in touch with him. As though his decision was taken he suddenly exclaimed:

"It's a go, then! I'll let you into my little secret, which so far hasn't been shared by a single living man. Then later on you can decide if you care to accept the risk for the sake of the glory success would bring, as well as striking a blow for the flag we all love!"

CHAPTER III

A BOLD PROJECT

"PITCH in, please!" urged the impatient Jack Parmly.

"Listen, then, boys," commenced the other earnestly. "You doubtless know that I've got more money than is good for any single man to handle? Well, I've squandered a small bunch of it in having a wonderful plane made and sent abroad. Of course it's intended to be handed over to the Government in due course of time, but with the proviso that they allow me to engineer the first long flight in it."

"That sounds interesting, Lieutenant," admitted Jack, apparently considerably impressed.

"Tell us some more about it, please," urged the practical Tom.

"It's possibly by long odds the largest bombing plane that so far has ever been built, even beating those big Caproni machines of Italy that can carry a dozen in the crew. This Martin bomber can be run by three hands, although sev-

eral more might be used if the right kind were found. It's possibilities in the way of distance and continued flight can hardly be estimated, since all depends on the cargo carried. The less crew, the more petrol and bombs to make up the load."

"Yes, we get that, Lieutenant," said Jack, as the other paused briefly, possibly to get his breath, and then again because he wished the information to sink slowly into their minds.

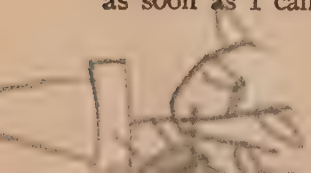
"With this monster biplane I assure you it will be an easy matter to fly all the way to Berlin, bomb the city so as to terrify the inhabitants even as they tried to do to Londoners, turn around, and return here without touching ground once; yes, and if necessary, repeating the trip."

Jack showed intense excitement, while Tom too was deeply interested.

"We knew that thing would soon arrive," the latter said; "and they say the Germans are getting cold feet already with the prospect before them. But it's come a little sooner than I, for one, expected. What's your big scheme, Lieutenant?"

"Berlin or bust?" chanced Jack explosively.

"You've hit the right nail on the head, Parmly," admitted the other, with a nod of appreciation. "I mean to show that it can be done. Just as soon as I can get that big bomber here, and



the permission to take on the job, we'll start some fine night for Berlin and give Heine the jolt of his life."

Jack thrust out his hand impulsively.

"You can count for one on my going, Lieutenant; that is, provided I get permission from the boss!" he announced promptly.

"I'm inclined to say the same," Tom added quietly, though his face displayed an eagerness he did not otherwise betray.

With that Lieutenant Beverly squeezed a hand of each.

"I mean to start things going shortly," he told them. "And you'll surely hear from me, for I must keep track of you boys."

"Where is the big Martin bomber now, did you say?" asked Jack.

"I didn't mention the fact, but it lies hidden in a special hangar on the French coast, not a great distance from Dunkirk," came the answer. "I have a special guard watching it, and my mechanicians keep everything ready for any sudden call. Right now she's tuned up to top-notch pitch, and a full supply of gas is kept on hand all the time, as well as everything needed in the way of supplies. That's where money talks."

Jack looked his admiration, and then burst out with:

"You're sure a dandy, Lieutenant Beverly,

and if ever you undertake that wonderful trip to Berlin and back I only hope I have the great good luck to be aboard."

"Consider it settled then," he was told. "And now that I've found my comrades for the venture I can go about further details, and start getting the consent of Headquarters to the enterprise. One of these nights Berlin is going to get a shock that may help bring the war to a speedy close."

"Here's our dugout," said Tom. "We're going back to work again after I've bandaged Jack's finger, for he gave it an ugly scratch when handling the gun, he doesn't himself know just how. Can we do anything further for you right now, Lieutenant?"

"Thank you, nothing, Raymond. I shall get on nicely. I'll rest up a day or so while things are simmering connected with that big affair. Of course it's to be a great secret among the three of us; not another soul knows anything about my project or the giant bombing plane I had shipped over to France."

"That's understood, and we're as mum as a couple of clams," Jack told him; and so they separated, little dreaming at the moment what a remarkable series of circumstances were fated to arise that would bring them together for the carrying out of an enterprise greater than any-

thing as yet recorded in the annals of aerial exploits.

Tom and Jack were back on the field before half an hour had elapsed, making a fresh start for the clouds, just as eager as ever to have some adventurous Hun airman accept their challenge and give them battle.

For a whole hour did they fly back and forth in the disputed territory between the two armies. Far beneath they could see by the aid of the powerful binoculars marching columns of soldiers, all heading toward the northwest. These they knew to be the German forces, making one of their regular daily retreats in fairly good order.

Behind them the Hun armies left innumerable nests of machine-gunners to dispute the advance of the Yankee battalions, and hold them in check, even at the price of utter annihilation. Many times the men selected for this sacrifice to the Fatherland held grimly on until they were completely wiped out by the sweep of the Americans.

Occasionally one of the Yankee pilots, provoked because none of the enemy dared to accept the gauge of battle he flung before them, would swoop down and try to make a target of these marching columns. Then for a brief period there would be exciting work, with the machine gun of the scurrying plane splashing its spray of bullets

amidst the scurrying soldiers, and the daring pilot in return taking their volleys.

Perhaps, if the boldness of the Americans caused them to take too great chances, there might be one less plane return to its starting point that day; and the report would be brought in that the pilot had "met his fate in the discharge of his duty."

Wearied at length of the useless task, the Air Service Boys finally gave it up for that afternoon. Jack in particular showed signs of keen disappointment, for he always chafed under inaction.

"There was some talk of another raid for tonight, you remember, Tom," he said, when they once more alighted and gave the plane over into the charge of the hostlers; "and if it turns out that way I only hope we're detailed to go along to guard the bombers. It's growing worse and worse right along these days, when Fritz seems to have gotten cold feet and refuses to accept a dare."

"I see fellows reading letters," remarked Tom suddenly. "Let's hope there is something for us."

"It's been a long time since I heard from home," sighed Jack. "I certainly hope everything is going on well in old Virginia these days.

There's Captain Peters waving something at us right now, Tom!"

"Letters, Jack, and a sheaf of them at that!"

"Come on, let's run!" urged the impatient one, suiting his actions to the words by starting off on a gallop.

Tom took it a little more slowly so that when he arrived and received his letters from the aviation instructor, who happened to be in the camp at the time, Jack was already deeply immersed in one which he had received.

It was late in the afternoon. The sun hung low in the west, looking fiery red, which promised a fair day on the morrow. Once he had his letters, however, Tom paid but scant attention to anything else.

His news from Virginia must have been pleasant, if one could judge from the smile that rested upon his wind and sun-tanned face as he read on. Again in memory he could see those loved ones in the old familiar haunts, going about their daily tasks, or enjoying themselves as usual. And whenever they sat under the well-remembered tree in the cool of the early fall evening, with the soft Virginia air fanning their cheeks, the red and golden hues of frost-touched leaves above them, he knew their talk was mostly of him, the absent one, most fondly loved.

Tom looked up. He thought he had heard a groan, or something very similar, break from the lips of his chum. It startled Tom so that when he saw how troubled Jack looked a spasm of alarm gripped his heart.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" he cried, leaning forward and laying a hand on the other's arm. "Have you had bad news from home?"

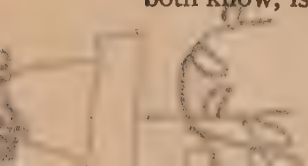
Jack nodded his head, and as he turned his eyes his chum saw there was a look of acute anxiety in them.

"No one dead, or sick, I hope, Jack?" continued the other apprehensively.

"No, at least that is spared me, Tom; they are all well. But just the same, it's a bad muddle. And the worst of it is I'm thousands of miles off, held up by army regulations, when I ought to get home for a short visit right away."

"See here, is it anything connected with that Burson property—has that matter come to a head at last?" demanded Tom, as a light dawned upon him.

"Nothing less," assented the other gloomily. "The issue has been suddenly forced, and may be settled any day. If I'm not there, according to the eccentric will of my uncle, Joshua Adams Kinkaid, that property will fall into the hands of my cousin, Randolph Carringford, who, as we both know, is just at present over here acting in a



confidential capacity to some Government official."

"Yes, I've seen him," said Tom, frowning. "And to tell the honest truth his face didn't impress me strongly. In fact, I didn't like your cousin. What's the use? All Virginia knows that Randolph Carringford is a black sheep—that no decent man or woman will acknowledge him for a friend. Wonder what Joshua Kinkaid meant, anyhow, by ringing him in. But are the lands worth as much as it was believed, Jack?"

"I learn in this letter from our lawyer that the richest kind of coal veins have been located on the Burson property in West Virginia; and that they promise to be valued at possibly a million dollars. Think of what that would mean to the Parmly family! For we are far from being rich. Father lost his grip on business you know, Tom, when he volunteered, and went into the Spanish war, and when he died did not leave very much."

"Do you suppose your cousin knows anything about this new development?" continued Tom sympathetically.

"He is too greedy not to have looked after every possible chance," came Jack's despondent reply. "And now that this thing's come up I can begin to understand why he kept smiling in that way all the time he chatted with me a week ago when we chanced to meet. I think he had

had a tip even then that this thing was coming off, and was laying his plans. Though how he could known, I can't imagine."

"Then you suspect he may already be on his way across, and will arrive before you can get there to put in your claim?" asked Tom.

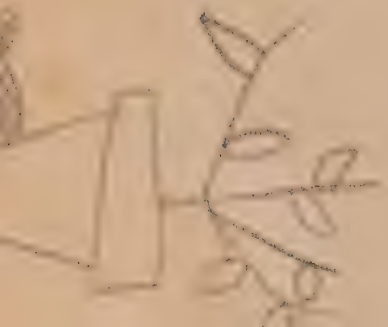
"Even allowing that he had no news until this mail got in, Tom, he'd get off a whole lot easier that I'll ever be able to, and so could catch a boat, while I kept untwisting the army red tape. It's a bad job all around, I'm afraid, and bound to make me feel blue."

"There's only one thing for you to do, Jack." remarked the energetic chum promptly, and his confidence gave the other considerable satisfaction.

"What is that?"

"Apply for leave at once. And include me at the same time, because I'll go with you, of course, Jack. We'll try to get back in time to join in the grand march to the Rhine. Promise me to do this before we sleep to-night!"

"I will, Tom, and here's my hand on it!"



CHAPTER IV

THE REST BILLET

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish, Jack!" Tom Raymond remarked several hours later, as he came into the dingy dugout where his chum was sitting.

A number of other pilots and observers occupied the same quarters, which had once been the refuge of German officers. Wretched though these quarters were, they at least afforded security from the bursting shells that were being sent across now and then by the enemy, from their positions on the hills to the northwest.

Jack had been paying small heed to the merriment of his mates, who, like most young men gathered together in a group, had been carrying on high. Sitting there with his head resting on his hand he had allowed himself to become buried in deep thought. A strained worried look had taken possession of his usually sunny face.

"What's the matter now, Tom?" he asked, with a deep sigh, as though he had been rudely

brought back to a realization of the fact that he was still in France, where the battle raged, and far removed from those peaceful Virginia scenes he had been picturing.

"We're ordered out with that raiding party to-night," Tom continued, lowering his voice to a whisper, since it was supposed to be a military secret, and not to be openly discussed.

"Oh! Well, what does it matter?" asked Jack, beginning to show animation. "We've put in our applications for leave, but the chances are they'll not be acted upon immediately, although we asked for speed. And nothing would please me more than to see action while I'm waiting. I'm afraid I'd go clean daffy unless I could forget my troubles in some way."

"Glad to hear you say that, Jack, because I'm feeling particularly keen myself to be one of that bunch to-night."

"When do we start?" demanded the other tersely.

"Not until two in the morning," came the low reply. "All that's been figured out with regard to the moon you know."

Jack took a quick glance around. So far as he could see, no one was paying the least attention to him and his comrade. One of the air pilots was trying to sing a song, being in jovial mood after receiving a letter that he admitted was from

his "girl in the States" and the others manifested a desire to join in the chorus, though none of them dared let their voices out, since it was against the rules.

"Did you learn anything about the job we've got on hand, Tom?"

"Yes, that's what I did; though I believe it was not generally told to all who are to be in the party," came the cautious reply. "Of course just before the flight they'll be given full particulars, when orders are issued to the pilots and observers. It's a bridge this time, Jack!"

"That one spanning the river about twenty miles back of the German lines, do you mean?"

"Yes, it's the most important bridge within fifty miles. Over it day and night the retreating Boche armies are passing. There's hardly a minute that guns and regiments may not be seen passing across at that point."

"Yes," observed Jack, "and a number of times some of our airmen have tried to bomb it in the daytime; but Fritz keeps such a vigilant watch we never could succeed in getting close enough to do any material damage. And so the High Command has decided that bridge must be knocked to flinders!"

"We're going out to make the attempt, anyhow," resumed Tom, nodding. "Four big bombing machines in the bunch, guarded by eight bat-

tleplanes; and we ve the good fortune to be chosen as the crew of one. I consider we're lucky, Jack."

"That's right, Tom. Though I don't feel quite as keen for it as I would have been had I not received that letter from our lawyer, asking me to hurry back home if I could possibly make it. Still, I'll be in for a bad night, anyhow, and might just as well be working."

"Are you worrying about your cousin?" demanded Tom suspiciously.

"To tell you the truth I am, more or less," Jack confessed. "I know him as a man utterly without principle. When he knows that it is a race between us to see which one can get to America first, so as to win the prize my foolish uncle left in such a haphazard way, there's absolutely nothing, I honestly believe, that Randolph wouldn't attempt in order to keep me from getting there in advance of him."

"Well, try to forget all that just now," said Tom. "I've a nice little surprise for you, Jack. I suppose you know they've got a sort of 'Y' hut running back here a bit?"

"Heard some of the fellows talking about it, but, somehow, didn't seem to take much stock in the news. Fact is, I've temporarily lost my taste for those doughnuts and the girls who give their time to jollying up our fellows, as well as attend-

ing to their many wants in the line of letter writing and such things."

"Perhaps," insinuated Tom, with a mild grin, "a doughnut mightn't go so badly now if the girl who offered it happened to answer to the name of Bessie?"

At that Jack suddenly began to show more interest. A gleam came into his saddened eyes and a faint smile to his face.

"That's an altogether different thing, Tom!" he exclaimed. "Do you really mean that Bessie and Mrs. Gleason are so close as all that?"

"If you care to walk out with me you can be talking to them inside of fifteen minutes," came the ready answer. "And while about it, I might as well tell you that Nellie is there too. Seems that she's attached to a field hospital staff that's keeping us close company, and, meeting the Gleasons, came over for the evening. She's been overworked lately, and needs some rest. I promised to come back for a short while, and fetch you along."

"Did—er, Bessie ask you to look me up?" asked Jack confusedly.

"To be sure! Twice at least. And I had to promise solemnly I'd do it even if I had to take you by the collar and hustle you there. But our time is limited, and we'd better be on our way, Jack."

The other showed an astonishing return to his old form. Apparently the mere fact that he was about to see the Gleasons again caused him to forget, temporarily at least, all about his fresh troubles. They were soon hurrying along, now and then dropping flat as some shell shrieked overhead or burst with a crash not far away.

Their relations with Mrs. Gleason and Bessie were very remarkable, and of a character to bind them close together in friendship. In fact, as has been described at length in one of the earlier books of this series, Tom and Jack had been mainly instrumental in releasing the mother and young daughter from a château where they were being held prisoner by an unscrupulous and plotting relative, with designs on their fortune.

The so-called "hut" of the Y. M. C. A. workers was really only another dilapidated and abandoned German dugout, which had been hurriedly arranged as a sort of makeshift headquarters, where the doughboys who could get leave might gather and find such amusement as the conditions afforded.

There were Salvation Army lassies present too, with their pies and doughnuts that made the boys feel closer to home than almost anything else, and even a sprinkling of Red Cross nurses from the field hospital who had been given a brief leave for recuperation.

Adjoining this particular rest billet was another of similar character run by the K. of C., which was also well patronized; indeed there seemed to be a friendly rivalry between the organizations to discover which could spread the most sunshine and cheer abroad.

Jack immediately was pounced upon by a pretty, young girl whose face was either very sunburned or covered with blushes. This was of course the Bessie mentioned by Tom. Others who watched professed a bit of envy because Jack received all her attention after he appeared.

Nellie Leroy, the Red Cross nurse, looked very sweet in her regulation hospital uniform, with the insignia of her calling on her sleeve. If her face bore a sad expression it was no more than must be expected of one seeing so much suffering at close quarters as came to the share of all the women and girls who devoted their very lives to such a calling. In Tom's eyes she was the prettiest girl in all France. It could also be seen that Nellie was very fond of the stalwart young air pilot, from the way in which her eyes rested on his figure whenever he chanced to be absent from her side during the next hour; which to tell the truth was not often.

Of course nothing was said about the night's dangerous work that lay ahead for the two chums. But Bessie noticed that Jack occasion-

ally looked grave, and questioned him concerning it. In answer he took her into his confidence to a certain extent concerning his reason for wanting to be in Virginia.

The time for separating came all too soon. Tom was very particular about this, being a firm believer in duty before pleasure.

"Look us up often if you get the chance," said Mrs. Gleason, who had been actively at work all the evening carrying out her customary duties, and proving indeed a "good angel" to scores of the young soldiers, who looked upon her as they might on their own mothers.

"You can depend on it we will," said Tom, giving Nellie a warm look that caused her eyes to drop and a wave of color to come into her cheeks.

"Wild horses couldn't keep me away, if I can get across," Jack told Bessie, as he was squeezing her little hand at separating. "But then you never know what's going to happen these days. All sorts of things are possible. If I do start across the big pond you'll hear of it, Bessie."

Jack looked back and waved his hand to the little group standing in the door of the dugout. He seemed much more cheerful than earlier in the evening, Tom thought; and as that had been one of his motives in getting the other across from the aviation camp he felt satisfied.

"And now for business," he remarked as they

made their way along, with a frequent bursting shell giving them light to see any gap in the road into which they might otherwise have stumbled.

Fritz was unusually active on this particular night, for some reason or other, for he kept up that hammering hour after hour. It might be the German High Command suspected that the Americans were ready to make a more stupendous push than had as yet been undertaken, with the idea of capturing a whole division, or possibly two, before they could get away; and this bombardment was continued in hopes of discouraging them.

The two Air Service Boys did not bother themselves about this, being content to leave all such matters to those in command. They had their orders and expected to obey them to the letter, which was quite enough for them.

Once more in their dugout, Tom and his comrade crawled into their limited sleeping quarters simply to rest, neither of them meaning to try to forget themselves in slumber.

When the time came for action they were soon crawling out of the hole in the ground. As pilots came and went unnoticed, each intent on his individual work, their departure caused not the faintest ripple. In fact, there were two other airmen who also came out and joined them when making for the place of the temporary canvas

hangars, they, too, having had secret orders concerning this same night raid.

Arriving on the open field, they found a busy scene awaiting them. Here were mechanicians by the score getting planes ready for ascension. The hum of motors and the buzz of propellers being tuned up could be heard in many quarters.

Those sounds always thrilled the hearts of the two boys; it seemed to challenge them to renewed efforts to accomplish great things in their chosen profession. When, however, they reached their own hangar and found a knot of mechanicians working furiously, Tom's suspicions instantly arose.

"What's wrong here?" he asked the man who was in charge of the gang.

"There's been some sort of ugly business going on, I'm afraid," came the reply; "for we're replacing several wire stays that look as if they'd been partly eaten by a corrosive acid. Smacks of rank treachery, Sergeant."

CHAPTER V

THE AIR RAIDERS

Upon hearing the words uttered by the mechanician who handled the men working at their battleplane, Tom and his chum exchanged meaning looks.

"Can you make it perfectly safe again before half an hour passes?" asked the former anxiously.

"Surely," came the confident reply. "I know what's in the wind, and you'll be fit for any sort of flight when another fifteen minutes has gone by. We're on the last stay now, and I've carefully examined the motor and every other thing about the plane. Don't fear to risk your lives on my report. I'd go up myself willingly if I had the chance."

"All right, Sessions, we're willing to take your word for it," Tom assured him, and then drew his comrade aside.

Jack on his part was eager for a little talk between themselves. That staggering fact had ap-

palled, as well as angered, him. Why should their particular plane have been selected for such treacherous work, among all the scores connected with the air service in that sector of the fighting front?

"What do you make of this thing, Tom?" he immediately demanded.

"It's an ugly bit of business, I should say," came the guarded reply.

"You mean calculated to make every one feel timid about taking any extraordinary risk—is that it?" continued Jack.

"Yes, if the fact were generally circulated. But according to my mind they'll keep it quiet until after the armada gets off. No use alarming the others, though orders have gone out I presume to have every plane carefully examined. Still, that would only be ordinary caution; we never go up without doing such a thing."

"Tom, do you think there could be any possible connection between this work of a German spy, as it appears on the surface, and my news from Mr. Smedley, the lawyer?"

"It's possible—even probable, Jack. A whole lot depends on whether we learn of any other plane having been meddled with. One thing sure, it'll spur them to greater vigilance about

watching things here. This isn't the first time there's been a suspicion of rank treachery. Planes have been known to be meddled with before now."

"I wouldn't put it past him!" muttered Jack sullenly.

"Meaning your cousin Randolph, I suppose," Tom added. "Nice opinion to have of a near relative, I must say. But then I'm inclined to agree with you. It may be only a queer coincidence, your getting such important news this afternoon, and some unknown party trying to bring about our downfall and death in this brazen way only a few hours afterwards."

"And using corrosive acid, too," spluttered the indignant Jack. "I've heard of ropes being partly cut, even wire stays or struts filed to weaken them; but this is the limit. Don't I wish they'd caught the skunk in the act!"

"He'd never have left this aviation camp alive," said Tom sternly. "Why, the boys would be so furious they'd be tempted to lynch him offhand."

"And I'd be glad to help pull the rope!" snapped Jack. "A more cowardly act couldn't be imagined than this. Air pilots take great enough chances, without being betrayed by spies or traitors."

"We'd better say nothing about it," Tom concluded. "I'm going to run over the entire machine on my own account."

"And I'll do the same, Tom; for a pilot can't be too sure of his mount, especially when there's such meanness afoot.

They accordingly busied themselves after their individual fashion. Every brace and stay was looked over carefully and tested as only pilots know how. Long experience, and many accidents have taught them where the weak spots lie, and they understand how to guard against the giving way at these points.

So the minutes passed. Other pilots had already ascended to await the assembling of the picked squadron at some given altitude. Every minute or two could be heard the rush of some unit starting forth. There were few of the accompaniments of an ordinary ascent, for all loud cries had been banned.

"All ready!" came the welcome words at last.

The last strut had been carefully gone over, and now everything was pronounced in perfect condition. At the same time, after such a discovery had been made, it was only natural for the boys to feel a queer tug in the region of their hearts as they climbed to their seats, and with hands that quivered a little proceeded to make fast the safety belts.

"There goes another bomber, which makes four—the full number you spoke of, Tom," remarked Jack. "I suppose we're holding up the procession more or less, worse luck, when usually we can be found in the lead."

"The commander must know about our mishap," replied Tom, "and isn't apt to blame us for any little delay. The night's still young, and we can reach our destination in half an hour, with time to spare. So cheer up, old comrade; everything's lovely and the goose hangs high. Now we're off!"

With that he gave the word, and paid attention to his motor, which started a merry hum. The propellers commenced to spin, and down the slight slope they ran with constantly increasing speed. All around them could be heard the refrain of planes in action; from above came similar sounds, and Jack, looking up, discovered dim scurrying forms of mysterious shape that flitted across the star-decked sky like giant bats.

Now they, too, were rising swiftly in spirals. Both kept a keen watch, for it was at this time they stood the greatest chance of taking part in an unfortunate collision that might result in a fatal disaster.

But every pilot was on edge, and careful to avoid any such blunder. They had been well drilled in all the maneuvers connected with just

such a hurried ascent in numbers. Each plane had its regular orbit of action, and must not overstep the bounds on penalty of the commander's displeasure.

After mounting to the arranged height, the Air Service Boys found that it was a very animated region, though fully a thousand feet from the earth's surface. Almost a dozen planes in all were moving in a great circle, their motors lazily droning, and the pilots ready to enter into squadron formation on signal.

In fact, Tom and his chum were the last to arrive, which under the circumstances was not to be wondered at.

"All on deck, I reckon," called out Jack, after he had taken a survey about him. "There's the signal from the flagship, Tom. We've got to keep the red lantern ahead of us and fall into line. There go the bombers to the center, and our place you said was on the left, tailing the whole bunch."

Like a well disciplined aerial navy they fell into place, each taking its position as previously arranged. When the formation was made complete another signal was given. This meant the advance was now to begin, and the crossing of the German lines undertaken.

Unless there chanced to be some mistake made concerning the proper altitude required, so as to

clear all possible bombardment when over the Hun lines, this might be accomplished without danger. So far as was known, they had gauged the utmost capacity for reaching them possessed by the German anti-aircraft guns, and Jack promised himself to jeer at the futile efforts of these gunners to explode their shrapnel shells close to the speeding armada.

Something must have been underrated, however; and, in fact, few plans can be regarded as absolutely perfect. The advancing raiders were passing over the enemy front when a furious bombardment suddenly burst forth below.

Jack could see the spiteful flashes of the numerous guns, and while the sound of the discharges came but faintly to his ears, to his consternation, all around them, as well as above and below, came sharp crackling noises, accompanied by bursts of dazzling light.

They were actually in the midst of a storm of bursting projectiles and in immediate peril of having some damage done to their swift-flying planes such as would spell ruin to the enterprise, perhaps bring instant death to some of the fliers!

CHAPTER VI

STRIKING A BLOW FOR LIBERTY

"CLIMB, Tom! Climb in a hurry!"

Jack Parmly shrilled these words close to the ear of his chum. Really, there was no need of his saying a single word, since the pilot had sensed their immediate danger just as quickly as had Jack himself. Already Tom was pulling the lever that would point the nose of their aerial craft upward toward the stars, and take them to a much loftier elevation.

The experience was very exciting while it lasted, Jack thought. He saw the numerous planes, forming the raiding squadron break formation in great haste, each pilot being eager to dodge the bursting shells and seek an elevation where they could not reach his flimsy craft.

It would take only one accidental shrapnel shell to cause the destruction of the best machine among them, and thus reduce the number of available airmen serving the cause of liberty.

For a brief interval the explosions continued

to sound all around them. But presently Jack was enabled to breathe easily again. They had climbed beyond the range of the German guns, no matter how heavily charged; and, besides this, they sped along rapidly, so that the Hun lines were soon left behind.

"Trouble's past. Admiral signaling keep on this level, Tom!" called out the observer.

"Got you, Jack!" came the answer, heard above the rushing noises that "made the welkin ring," as Jack told himself.

The firing ceased as the German gunners realized, to their chagrin doubtless, that again their intended prey had eluded them. They must have set those anti-aircraft quick-firers of theirs in fresh elevated emplacements after the Yankees had taken the measure of their power to do harm; but the trap, if such it was intended to be, had failed to catch a single victim.

"Did they get any of our crowd?" Tom called out, feeling considerable uneasiness as to the result of the bombardment.

"Never touched us," he was immediately assured by the observant Jack. "All the same it was a smart trick, and somebody's bound to be hauled over the coals on account of the blunder."

"Yes," admitted Tom, speaking loud so as to be heard above the roar of the numerous planes around them, "because it might have played hob

with the squadron, and even ruined the success of the whole expedition."

After that they relapsed into silence. It was exceedingly difficult to try to keep up any sort of conversation while going at such a furious pace through the upper air currents. Besides, the night was cold at such an elevation, and consequently both boys had their heads well muffled up, making use of hoods with goggles for the purpose. They also wore gloves on their hands, as well as heavy sweaters under their leather-lined coats.

The formation, in a way, reminded Jack of many a flock of wild geese that he had seen flying north or south over Virginia in their spring and autumn migrations. In the lead went the battleplane containing the squadron commander, forming the apex of the triangle, and showing a fiery red eye in the shape of an automobile rear light as a rallying point for all the other machines.

Then the seven other battleplanes sank away from the apex, three on one side and four on the other, that of the Air Service Boys being the one to the rear of all the rest.

Flying two and two abreast, and guarded on both sides by those sturdy fighting craft came the four huge bombers, each heavily laden with the most destructive of explosives. They, too,

could show teeth if cornered and compelled to depend on their own defensive powers; for each of them carried a machine gun, of which the observer had been trained to make good use, just as he must know how to drop his bombs successfully when the proper instant arrived.

All seemed quiet just at present, but none of those guiding the aerial racing craft deceived themselves with the belief that this could last long. It went without saying that the Huns must realize the necessity for guarding the important bridge across which their beaten armies were flocking day and night in constantly increasing numbers. Unless the guns could be taken across in safety, they stood to lose many of their best batteries.

Consequently they would be apt to assemble a flotilla of fighting planes in that vicinity, ready to soar aloft and give furious battle to any Allied squadron venturesome enough to make the attempt at destruction.

If the blowing up of the bridge could only be accomplished, the sacrifice of a few planes with their crews might be counted a cheap price to pay for the great benefits reaped.

The minutes passed, and all the while the raiders were drawing nearer and nearer their intended goal. Every pilot and observer in that squadron had been carefully selected with a view

to his fitness for the gigantic task that had been laid out for accomplishment.

There would be no hesitation when the eventful moment came, since none was present save those who had been tried in the furnace of battle and found to be fine gold, eighteen carat pure. Such a thing as flinching when the test came was not to be considered; they would carry through their appointed tasks or fall while in the endeavor, paying the price the airman has ever had dangled before his eyes.

Jack was using his night-glass, and he now broke out with a cry.

"We must be getting close to the bridge, Tom! I can see flickering lights darting about, and I believe they must be planes rushing up into the air!"

"Like as not they've been warned of our coming by the row we're making," replied the pilot, in a shout. "Then again those Huns along the line would send word back, for they must know what we're aiming at. It's all the same to us. We came out after action, and we'd be terribly disappointed if we didn't get a lot of it."

Then came signals from the leading plane. Closer formation was the rule from that time forward, since the bombers must be amply protected in order to allow their gunners an opportunity to get to work with those frightful ex-

plosives and hurl them at the place where the bridge was supposed to lie.

Both boys began to feel their pulses thrill with eagerness, as well as excitement. Looking down, Jack could detect moving lights, the source of which he could only speculate upon. Then came a flash which must mark the discharge of the first anti-aircraft gun. The enemy was showing exceeding nervousness, for as yet the leading American plane could not be anywhere within range.

With the burst of shrapnel there came a realization that the gunners below were only trying to get their range. The whole pack would break loose in another minute or less; but Jack had reason to believe their altitude was such as to render the fusillade harmless.

Then down below he saw a sudden brilliant flash. That must mark the falling of a flaming bomb, dropped from one of the big planes in order to get a lead on their location. Jack believed he had even glimpsed the bridge itself in that brief interval. How the prospect thrilled him!

Tom, on his part, had little opportunity to observe anything that was taking place earthward. His duty lay closer at hand, for he knew that a swarm of fighting Gothas had started up to engage the attacking squadron, and realized that

one or more of these hostile aircraft might suddenly appear close at hand, bent on bringing about their destruction.

Besides, constant vigilance was the price of safety in other particulars. With almost a dozen of their own planes speeding through space, a false move on the part of a careless pilot was apt to bring about a collision that could have only one result.

Jack made a discovery just then that caused him to cry out.

"The signal, Tom! We are to drop down and give the bombers a better chance to get there. No matter what the cost, we've got to reach that bridge to-night!"

Already Tom was changing the course. They had begun to swing lower, each unit of the attacking squadron in its appointed place. A brief interval followed, and then came the bursting shrapnel again around them, while from several quarters close by hovering German planes commenced using their machine guns, to be answered by the challengers in like manner.

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE IN THE AIR

THE din soon became general, one after another of the American planes joining in the battle. The German aircraft held off a little, fighting from afar, evidently thinking to accomplish their ends without taking too much risk. Had they boldly assaulted, doubtless the result would have been much more disastrous to both sides.

The big bombers had but one object in view, which was to bomb the important target below. To drop an explosive on a certain spot had been the most important training of those aboard these craft. They had been carefully selected from the ranks of the many observers taking service in the aviation branch of the service; and great things were expected of them now.

The Huns had concentrated the glare of numerous searchlights on the hub of the squadron's activities, so that the speeding planes could be seen darting hither and thither like bats during an August evening, darting around some arc-light in the street.

The flash of the distant guns aboard the planes

looked like faint fire-flies in action. No longer was the earth wrapped in darkness, for flares dropped by the bombers kept continually on fire. The bridge stood plainly out, and a keen eye, even without the aid of glasses, could distinguish the rush of terrorized German troopers trying to get clear of the danger zone before a well directed bomb struck home.

Jack, leaning from his seat, took all this in. He was keyed to the top-notch by what he saw and heard. Tame indeed did most other incidents of the past appear when compared with this most stupendous event.

"Wow!" burst from his lips, as a sudden brilliant flash below told that the first huge bomb had struck; but with all that racket going on around of course no ordinary human voice could have been heard.

He could see that it had not been a successful attempt, for the bomb struck the ground at some little distance away from the terminus of the structure spanning the river. However, it did considerable damage where it fell, and created no end of alarm among those who were near by.

As yet the Air Service Boys had not been engaged with any of the hostile planes, though most of the other Yankee pilots seemed to be having their hands full in meeting and repelling fierce attacks.

Both kept in readiness for work should their turn come, Tom manipulating the plane, and Jack working the rapid-fire gun which he had learned to handle so cleverly.

Strangely enough, Jack, as he looked, was reminded of a vast circus which he had once attended, and where tumblers, athletes, and trained animals were all performing in three rings at the same time. He had found it utterly impossible to watch everything that went on, and remembered complaining lustily afterwards in consequence.

Now there were some eleven rings in all, besides what was taking place thousands of feet below, where the bombs had started to burst, tearing great gaps in the ground close to the bridge, and causing the water itself to gush upward like spouting geysers.

Lower still dropped the venturesome pilots guiding the destinies of the four huge bombers. What chances they were taking, bent only on succeeding in the important task to which they had been assigned!

Jack knew he would never forget that dreadful crisis, no matter if he were allowed to live to the age of Methuselah; such an impression did it make upon his mind

But their turn came at length, for in the dim light two big Gothas were discovered swinging

in toward them as though bent on bringing about the destruction of the Yankee battleplane.

Jack forgot about what was taking place below, since all of his energies must now be directed toward beating off this double attack. It had come to the point of self-preservation. The Hun airmen were playing a prearranged game of hunting in couples. While one made a feint at attacking, the other expected to take advantage of an exposure and inflict a fatal blow that would send the American aeroplane whirling to death.

Jack saw when the nearest plane opened fire. The spitting flame told him this, for it darted out like the fiery tongue of a serpent. He also realized that the bullets were cutting through space all around them; and a splinter striking his arm announced the fuselage of the plane had already been struck, showing the gunner had their range.

Then Jack began work on his own account, not meaning to let the fight become one-sided. His duty was to pepper any of the enemy craft that came within range, regardless of consequences. To Tom must be left the entire running of the plane motor, as well as the maneuvering that would form a part of the affray.

Heedless of what was taking place around them, the two chums devoted their attention to the task of baffling the designs of their two foes. Wonderfully well did Tom manage his aerial

steed. They swung this way and that, dipped, rose, and cut corners in a dizzying fashion in the endeavor to confuse the aim of the Hun marksmen.

Once Jack experienced a sudden sinking in the region of his heart. There was a strange movement to the plane that made him fear the motor had been struck. He also missed the cheery hum at the same time, and felt a sickening sensation of falling.

But immediately he realized that Tom was only executing his pet drop, the nose-dive. One of the Huns followed them down, just as a hawk might pursue its prey. When the American plane came out of the dive at the new level Jack saw that the Hun was closer than ever, and once again starting to bombard them.

At least they now had only a single adversary to deal with, which could be reckoned a point gained. Most of the fighting was going on above them, but Jack believed the bombers must be somewhere near by, possibly at a still lower level.

Again the maneuvering, or jockeying, for position commenced. In this air duel the pilot who knew his business best was going to come out ahead. It might be they were opposed by some celebrated German ace with a long list of victories to his credit, which would render their chances smaller.

Tom, however, seemed to be keeping up his end wonderfully well. The hissing missiles cut through the canvas of their wings, beat upon the side of the fuselage, and even nipped the Air Service Boys more than once as they stormed past. Neither of the boys knew whether they were seriously wounded or not; all they could do was to fight on and on, until something definite had been achieved on one side or the other.

Once Jack felt something blinding him, and putting up a hand discovered that it was wet; yet he was not conscious of having been struck in the head by a passing bullet. Dashing his sleeve across his eyes he shut his jaws still tighter together, and continued to play his gun as the opportunity arose.

They were coming to closer quarters, and the issue of the battle, however dreadful the result, could not be much longer delayed, Jack knew.

Then it happened, coming like a flash of lightning from the storm cloud!

CHAPTER VIII

BOMBING THE BRIDGE

"Tom, we've done it!" Jack shrieked, when he saw the enemy Gotha plane take a sudden significant dip and flutter downward like a stricken bird.

Evidently a shot more fortunate than any that had preceded it had struck a vital part of the rival craft, putting the motor suddenly out of repair.

When he felt his plane begin to crumple up under him the Hun pilot had commenced to strive frantically to recover control. Jack, horror-stricken by what was happening, leaned over and watched his struggle, which he knew was well nigh hopeless from the beginning.

Still the German ace made a valiant effort to avoid his fate. He could be seen working madly to keep from overturning, but apparently his hour had struck, for the last Jack saw of the beaten Gotha it was turning topsy-turvy, falling like a shooting star attracted to the earth by the law of graviation.

That affair being over, Jack, breathing hard, now allowed himself to pay some attention to what was going on in other quarters. At the same time he proceeded to introduce a fresh belt of cartridges into the hungry maw of the machine gun, in case they were forced into another engagement.

Above them the battle still raged, though of course Jack could not decide which side might be getting the better of it. His interest focused chiefly on the bombing machines, which he found were now far away, moving along in erratic courses as their pilots strove to get in exact position for a successful blowing up of the bridge.

Jack could count only three of them. Unless the fourth had wandered far afield it looked as though disaster had overtaken its crew. No matter, even such a catastrophe must not deter those remaining from seeking by every means in their power to reach their objective.

Even as he stared downward Jack saw another of those brilliant flashes that proclaimed the bursting of a bomb. He felt a sense of chagrin steal over him, because so far no explosive seemed to have succeeded in attaining the great end sought. The bridge still stood intact, if deserted, for he could catch glimpses of it when the smoke clouds were drifted aside by the night breeze.

Fires were now burning in several quarters, started undoubtedly by some of the bombs that had missed their intended objective. These lighted up the scene and gave it a weird, almost terrifying aspect as witnessed from far above.

All at once Jack saw some bulky object pass between their machine and the ground below. It must be the missing bomber, he concluded, though the realization of the fact made him thrill all over in admiration of the nerve of those who could accept such terrible chances.

Yes, despairing of getting in a telling blow at such a height, the reckless crew of the big Yankee plane had actually dropped down until they could not be more than a thousand feet from the earth. And now they were speeding forward, meaning to test their skill at such close quarters.

Not being able to make Tom hear his voice, Jack gave the other a tug, and so managed to call his attention to what was passing below. Just in time did Tom look, for at that very moment there came another of those amazing brilliant illuminations, and the dull roar greeted their ears a few seconds afterwards.

They saw with staring eyes the air filled with the material that had once constituted the wonderful bridge, across which day and night the retreating Huns were taking their valuable guns and stores. A brief space of time did the scene

bear the aspect of chaos, and then, when the smoke cleared sufficiently for them to see, they looked upon a void where the bridge had stood.

Jack fell back appalled, yet quivering with deepest satisfaction. Their raid would be one of triumph, since the main object had now been achieved.

Hardly had he allowed himself to exult after this fashion than Jack discovered that Tom seemed to be greatly agitated. So he once more looked down, filled with a sudden fear lest the gallant fighters in that adventurous bomber had paid dearly for their success.

He immediately saw that his alarm was not groundless. The big Yankee plane must have been struck in some vital part, for it was rapidly sinking as though doomed. Jack's only consolation lay in the fact that the crew seemed to be in better luck than those of the stricken Gotha; for they managed to keep from turning turtle; and unless striking the ground with too great violence might yet come out of the affair alive, even though finding themselves prisoners of war.

Tom was already striking for the upper levels. He saw that the other three bombers had also commenced to climb, since their mission was now carried out, and further risks would be only a needless hazard. Then, too, the crews of the battle Gothas, realizing that they had failed to

save the bridge, concluded to withdraw from the combat, leaving the Americans to make their way back to their starting point, victorious and rejoicing.

Yes, there was the signal flashing from the plane of the commander, which meant that the raiding squadron should assemble above the reach of the crackling shrapnel, and prepare in a body for the homeward journey.

A sense of exultation, mingled with sincere thankfulness, gripped the hearts of the two Air Service Boys as they realized that the peril was now really a thing of the past. The homeward trip would be a mere bagatelle, for surely no Huns would venture to attack them while on the way. By exercising good judgment they ought also to keep above the reach of those elevated anti-aircraft guns along the front hills.

Now Jack remembered the temporary blinding sensation. He found on investigating that he had been near a serious accident, since a passing bullet had grazed his head, cutting the skin and causing quite a copious flow of blood.

"What's happened to you?" called out the alarmed Tom, on seeing that the other was binding his handkerchief about his head.

"Another scratch, that's all," replied Jack, as though that were only a matter of course, to be expected when modern knights of the upper air

currents sallied forth bent on adventure. "A miss is as good as a mile, you know, Tom. And I guess I have a hard head in the bargain. It's all right, nothing to worry over. Fortunately it didn't strike me in the face, and mar my beauty any."

Jack could joke under almost any serious conditions; but Tom felt relieved to know the worst. They were at the time back again in their appointed place, tailing the procession.

Counting again as best he could, Jack discovered that there were only seven of the battle-planes in the double line now. It looked very much as though the loss of the big bomber was not the only penalty they had paid for their daring raid. But no doubt the story would all be told after the flight was over and the various pilots and observers could get together to compare notes.

Again were they subjected to a bombardment when they sailed over the German front lines; but this time, taking a lesson from their previous experience, they maintained such an altitude that no shrapnel was able to reach them.

Shortly afterward, and one by one, the battered Yankee planes dropped on the open field where the hangars lay, like huge buzzards alighting to satisfy their hunger in an orgy.

The first thing Tom did when he and Jack

found themselves again on their feet and the waiting mechanicians and hostlers looking after their plane, was to reach out and seize upon his chum's hand.

"We've got good reason to congratulate ourselves on coming through that nasty business so well, Jack," he said earnestly. "If you look at our machine you'll see how near we came a dozen times to cashing in our checks. They knocked us up pretty well, for a fact."

"I should say they did," admitted Jack, as he examined the various marks showing where the Hun bullets had punctured different parts of the wings, or struck the fuselage, narrowly missing both the motor and the partly protected petrol supply tank.

They lingered around for a full hour, there was so much to talk about as they gathered in groups and compared experiences, as well as commented on the possible fate of their fellow aviators who had failed to return.

In spite of the loss incurred, the achievement accomplished was of such a character as to fill them with pardonable pride. No member of that historical night raid, whereby the retreat of the Germans was so badly handicapped by the loss of the big bridge, would ever have cause to blush for his part in the bold undertaking.

Finally the two chums, finding themselves ex-

hausted and in need of sleep, broke away from the chattering throng and sought their bunks in the former Hun dugout. All was now silence around them, the enemy batteries having ceased sending over even occasional shells; and they were able to enjoy a few hours of rest undisturbed by having the roof of their shelter damaged by a chance explosion.

On the following morning the advance was resumed, the same tactics being employed that had met with such success all through the Argonne. Wherever they discovered that machine-gun nests had been placed these were "mopped-up" by surrounding them, and then attacking from the rear, while the attention of the defenders of the stone house, or it might be a windmill foundation, was gripped by a pretense at frontal assault.

Those who had participated in the air raid on the bridge were given a day off, so as to recuperate. They felt that they deserved it, for the destruction of that bridge was apt to be a serious stumbling-block in the path of the retreating Huns, one that might cost them dearly in the way of prisoners and lost artillery.

Jack utilized this opportunity by striving to learn important facts in connection with the matter that was weighing so heavily on his mind. He absented himself from the dugout which the

air pilots continued to occupy and which they disliked giving up until assured of some other half-way decent billet in a village that might be abandoned by Fritz when falling back.

Of course Jack had to have his slight wounds attended to, and in order to make sure that he had not neglected this before going off, Tom, during the morning, found it absolutely necessary to wander over to the field hospital, where of course he looked up Nellie.

Really it took almost a full hour for him to make all the inquiries he considered essential; and he might have consumed a still longer time but that there was a call for the nurse's services, and she had to excuse herself.

"Never mind," said Tom grimly to himself, as he made his way back to the old dugout, "it was well worth the walk. And Nellie is looking fine, for a fact. They call her the most popular nurse at the front, and I've heard fellows in plenty say that if ever they got knocked out by Hun bullets they'd want nothing better than to have her take care of them."

He did not find Jack anywhere around when he got back, nor had those he asked seen anything of him since early morning. Of course Tom knew what it was that engaged the attention of his comrade, and he only hoped Jack might not meet with any bad luck in his endeavor

to learn something of the movements of his cousin, Randolph Carringford.

Then came the afternoon. From indications Tom fancied that would be their last night in the old dugout. The Huns were still falling back, and word had been going around that by another day the Yankees would undoubtedly occupy the village that lay just beyond the hills where the bursting shrapnel had ascended on the occasion of the passage of the air squadron.

It was about four o'clock when Tom sighted his chum. Jack's face was gloomy, and he lacked his customary sprightliness of walk.

As he came up he tried to smile, but it was a rank failure.

"Well," he said disconsolately, "the very worst has happened, Tom. I've managed to get word after trying for hours, and have learned that my cousin sailed yesterday from Havre. He's beat me to it, and I've lost out!"

CHAPTER IX

CONVINCING PROOF

"ARE you sure about that?" asked Tom, though at the same time realizing that Jack was not the one to give in easily, and must have used every avenue for gaining information before reaching this condition of certainty.

"There's not the slightest reason to doubt it, I tell you, Tom," Jack replied slowly, shaking his head at the same time to emphasize his sorrowful feelings in the matter. "I asked particularly, and the word came that a passenger named Randolph Carringford had sailed yesterday on the *La Bretagne* for New York."

"Then that point seems settled," admitted Tom, though disliking to acknowledge the fact. "Still, something might happen to prevent his reaching New York City, or Virginia."

"What could stop him, since I'm utterly powerless to do anything?" asked Jack, still unconvinced.

"Well," continued the would-be comforter,

"vessels have started out before this and never arrived at their destination. Take the *Lusitania* for instance. More than ever are the Hun submersibles on the job these critical days, for their commanders know they've almost got to their last gasp."

"No such luck for me, I'm afraid, Tom," sighed the other, quickly adding: "And for that matter I wouldn't want to profit at the expense of the lives of others. So I hope the French boat gets safely past the closed zone, no matter what it costs me personally. But it galls me to feel how helpless I am. If my hands were tied this minute I couldn't be worse off."

"Are you sure cabling would do no good, if we could manage to send an urgent message?"

"Nothing will do except my presence there in person before Randolph can present himself, thanks to our uncle's foolish will that puts a premium on rascality. Yes, it's a bitter pill I have to swallow. I'd do anything under the sun if only I could hope to beat that scheming cousin out! But it's useless; so I'll just have to grin and bear it."

"I wish I had any suggestion to offer," remarked Tom; "but to tell the truth I don't see what you can do but wait and see what happens. We've got our applications for leave in, and some influential friends pulling wires to help us

through. Something may turn up at the last minute."

"It's mighty fine of you to say that, though I know you're only trying to keep me from discouragement."

"See who's coming, will you?" suddenly ejaculated Tom.

Even before he looked the other could give a shrewd guess as to the identity of the person approaching, for Tom seemed unduly pleased.

"It's Nellie, as sure as anything," muttered Jack. "I wonder what's brought her over here. You don't imagine anything could have happened to Bessie or Mrs. Gleason—the Huns haven't been trying to bomb any 'Y' huts or hospitals lately, have they, Tom?"

"Not that I've heard," came the ready answer. "And besides, I had the pleasure of chatting with Nellie for a whole hour this morning. You see I got a bit anxious about you; was afraid you'd neglected to step over and get those cuts attended to as you'd promised; so to make sure I wandered across."

"Of course you did!" jeered Jack. "And if that excuse hadn't held water there were plenty more shots in the locker! But never mind; here's Nellie hurrying toward us. Doesn't she look rather serious, Tom?"

"We'll soon know what's in the wind," was

the answer, as the pretty Red Cross nurse hastened to join the two boys.

"You didn't expect to see me again so soon, I imagine, Tom," she said as she came up, trying to catch her breath at the same time, for she had evidently hurried.

"No, I must say I didn't dream I'd have that pleasure, Nellie," replied the air pilot, as he took her hand in his and squeezed it. "But something unusual must have brought you all the way over here, I imagine."

"Well, it was, Tom," she told him.

"It isn't safe either," continued Tom, "for you to be abroad. The Huns are likely to begin long range shelling any minute, and the road's a favorite target for their gunners; they've got it's range down fine."

"It isn't about Bessie, I hope?" ventured Jack, still more or less apprehensive.

Nellie looked at him and slightly smiled, for she knew Jack was exceedingly fond of the young girl.

"Bessie is perfectly well," she assured him; "and when I passed the Y hut she and her mother were helping some of the Salvation Army girls make a fresh heap of doughnuts. But my coming does concern you, Jack."

"Please explain what you mean by that?" he begged her, while his face lighted up with in-

terest, showing that for the moment his troubles, lately bearing so heavily upon him, were forgotten.

"I will, and in as few words as possible," she answered, "for my time is limited. I left several cases to be cared for by a nurse who has not had as thorough a training as she might have had, and the responsibility lies with me. But I can give you five minutes before I start back again."

Needless to say Nellie by this time had both boys fairly agog with curiosity, for neither of them could give the slightest guess as to the nature of the news she was bringing.

"You see, they were bringing in a lot of fresh cases," she explained, "for there has been some furious fighting going on this morning, as our boys drove in to chase the Huns out of the village. Among the number of wounded one man among others fell into my care. His name is Bertrand Hale, and I think both of you know him."

Tom and Jack exchanged looks.

"We have met him many times," said the former; "but I can't say that he has ever been a friend of ours. He's rather a wild harum-scarum sort of chap—I imagine his own worst enemy, for he drinks heavily when he can get it, and spends much of the time in the guard-house.

Still, they say he's a fighter, every inch of him, and has done some things worth mentioning."

"I imagine you describe him exactly, Tom," Nellie told him. "Very well, this time he's in a pretty bad way, for he has a number of serious injuries, and, besides has lost his left arm, though it's possible he may pull through if his constitution hasn't been weakened too much through dissipation."

"But what about Bertrand Hale, Nellie? Did he tell you anything that would be of interest to us?" asked Tom.

"I can see that you're beginning to suspect already, Tom," she continued. "For that is exactly what happened. He kept following me with his eyes as I moved around doing my work, after taking care of him. Then he beckoned to me, and asked whether I wasn't a particular friend of Jack Parmly and Tom Raymond.

"Of course I assured him it was so, and with that he looked so very eager that I knew he had a secret to tell me. This is the gist of what he said, boys. Just four days ago he was approached by a man he didn't know, who managed to get some strong drink into his hands, and after Hale had indulged more than he ought made a brazen proposition to him.

"It was to the effect that he was willing to

pay a certain sum to have you boys injured so that you would be laid up in the hospital for weeks. He had gained the promise first of all that Bertrand would never say a word about what he meant to tell him.

"Although he admitted that his mind was hardly clear at the time, still Bertrand assured me he had repelled the offer with indignation, and even threatened to beat up his tempter unless he took himself off. The man hurried away, and then in the excitement of the order for his battalion to go over the top Bertrand Hale forgot all about it.

"From that time on it was nothing but fighting and sleeping for him, so he had no time even to think of warning you. Then he got into the mess this morning that finished him. With that arm gone he's done with fighting, he knows, even if he pulls through.

"It was the sight of me that made him remember, for he said he surely had seen me with one of you boys several times. And so he confessed, begging me to get word to you, so that if the unknown schemer did find a tool to carry out his evil plots you would be on your guard.

"I could not wait after hearing that, but came as fast as I could, fearing you might have set out again and that something would go wrong

with your plane. That is the story simply told, Tom. Can you guess why any one should wish to do either of you such a wrong as that?"

"What you tell us, Nellie," said Tom soberly, "clears up one mystery we've been puzzling over."

Then he rapidly sketched what they had discovered on the preceding night, when they had arrived at the hangar prepared to go forth with the raiders, only to learn that some unknown person had been meddling with their plane.

"So it looks as if Bertrand's refusal to play the dirty game didn't prevent that man from finding some one who was willing to sell his soul for money," was the way Tom wound up his short story.

Nellie was appalled. Her pretty face took on an expression of deepest anxiety, showing how much she cared should ill-fortune attend these good friends of hers.

"How can such wickedness exist when war had made so many heroes among our boys?" she mourned. "But you must be doubly on your guard, both of you. Tell me, can you guess why this unknown person should want to injure you?"

"Simply to keep me from setting out for America," said Jack bitterly. "Let me describe my cousin Randolph to you, Nellie; and then tell

me if what Bertrand said about the unknown man would correspond to his looks."

After she had heard his accurate description Nellie nodded her head.

"He saw very little of his face," so he said. "Bertrand only said the other was a man of medium build, with a soft voice that made him think of silk and then too he had a trick of making gestures with his left hand, just as you've said your cousin does. Yes, something tells me your guess is close to the mark; but he must be a very wicked man to attempt such a dreadful thing."

"Worse than I ever thought," admitted Jack grimly. "But after all nothing came of his lovely scheme; nor did it matter, since he's given me the slip, and is right now almost a third of the way across the sea. I'm like a race-horse left at the post."

"Whatever you do, Jack, don't lose the fine courage that has been your mainstay through other troubles," Nellie said, as she laid a hand on his arm and looked steadfastly into the young air-pilot's face.

"Thank you, Nellie, for your confidence in me," he continued, showing some of his old spirit again. "I ought to be ashamed to give in so easily. Yes, Tom and I have been in plenty

of bad scrapes, and pulled out just because we set our teeth and refused to admit we were down and out. So I'm going to try the same dodge in this case, and not acknowledge defeat until the ninth inning is through, and the last man down."

"Good-bye, both of you, and remember, no matter what comes some of us are always thinking of you and praying for your safety."

With these words, long remembered by both boys, Nellie gave each of them her hand, and hurried away before they could see how her eyes dimmed with the gathering mists.

"A brave girl," said Tom, with considerable vigor, as he tenderly watched her retreating figure and waved his hand when he saw her turn to blow a farewell kiss in their direction.

"Yes," said Jack, heaving a sigh. "She and Bessie seem to be our good angels in this bad mess of war, Tom. I feel better after hearing her words of encouragement; but all the same I'm still groping in the dark. How am I going to beat Randolph across the Atlantic? For once I wish I had wings, and might fly across the sea like a bird. How quickly I'd make the start."

CHAPTER X

GROPING FOR LIGHT

Tom realized that for once his chum was completely broken up, and hardly knew which way to turn for help. This told him that if anything were done to relieve the desperate situation it would have to originate with him.

"Stick to your programme, Jack, and don't give up the ship. Until you know that Randolph has reached the other side, and entered into possession of the property, there's still some hope left."

"Yes, a fighting chance. And I must hang to it like a leech," admitted the other, trying to smile, but making a sorry mess of it.

"How do we know what the good fairy may do for you, so as to outwit the villain of the piece?" continued Tom. "While it isn't a pleasant thing to speak of, still some marauding undersea boat may lie in wait for his ship, and in the sinking who can tell what fate may overtake your cousin?"

"It would only serve him right if he did go down like others, a thousand times nobler than Randolph, have done before now," grumbled Jack; and somehow the vague possibility excited him, for his eyes began to sparkle and take on a look that told Tom he was seeing the whole thing before his mental vision.

For a purpose Tom chose to encourage this supposition; it would have the effect of building up Jack's sinking hopes, and just then that was the main thing. So Tom proceeded to picture the scene, having plenty of material from which to draw, for he had read the details of more than one submarine sinking.

"It must be a terrible sensation to any passenger, no matter how brave he may think himself," he went on to say, "when he feels the shock as a torpedo explodes against the hull of the steamer and knows that in a short time she is doomed to be swallowed by the sea. And you told me once yourself, Jack, that this scheming cousin of yours couldn't swim a stroke."

"Worse even than that!" declared Jack, with a sneer on his face to express his contempt, "he's a regular coward about the water. And if they do have the hard luck to run up against a Hun torpedo, Randolph will be frightened half to death."

"Queer," commented Tom, "how most of

these schemers prove to have a yellow streak in their make-up, when the test really comes. Just picture him running screaming up and down the deck, and being kicked out of the way by every officer of the vessel when he implores them to save him."

"I can see it all as plain as day!" cried Jack excitedly. "And if I know human nature the chances are those sailors would think of the coward last of all."

"Yes, they'd leave him to the sinking ship if there was no room in the boats, you can depend on that, Jack. And now set your teeth as you usually do, and tell me again that you're not going to own up beaten until the umpire says the game is over."

"I do promise you, Tom," came the immediate response, showing that Jack was getting a fresh grip on his sinking courage and hopes. "But all the same, I keep on groping, and I'd like to see the light."

"For a change of subject," Tom observed, "shall we tell Lieutenant Beverly about your troubles? I've just glimpsed him coming this way."

"No reason why we shouldn't," agreed Jack. "He's a good friend of mine and three heads might be better than two in cracking this hard nut I'm up against. But he looks as if he might

be bringing us news. Ten to one he's going to say the way is cleared for us to take that long trip with him to Berlin and back in his big Martin bomber."

"Too bad to disappoint him," remarked Tom. "But of course that's out of the question now."

"I'd have been glad of the chance to go, only for this sudden complication in my own affairs," Jack sighed. "But why couldn't you take the spin in his company, Tom? It's a pity to break up his plans."

"And desert my chum when he's in trouble? I'd never forgive myself for doing such a thing. The lieutenant will have to find some other pals for his record making Berlin and back flight."

Jack thought he detected a vein of regret in his comrade's voice, and he quickly flashed:

"You're disappointed, of course, Tom; you've been counting on that trip all the while, because its daring and dash appealed to you, just as they did to me."

"Forget it, please," urged Tom sturdily. "It was only a dream, and, after all, perhaps it couldn't be carried out. For all we know it may be the best thing in the world for us that we're prevented from starting; for such a long flight is a great risk, and might end our careers."

"Well, here's the lieutenant," said Jack, turn-

ing to greet the newcomer, and striving to look natural, though it cost him a great effort.

"I've hurried here as fast as I could!" exclaimed Beverly, his eyes sparkling with pleasure. "I wanted to bring the good news before you received it officially."

"What's that?" demanded Jack, turning a puzzled look toward his chum.

"Why, when they notified me I could have three weeks' leave of absence from duty, with no question concerning my movements during the interim, I chanced to learn that your request had also been granted. Both of you will be free, don't you understand? and the big game is now open to us."

"Well, that's certainly good news you've brought us, Lieutenant Beverly," said Tom, accepting the other's extended hand which was offered in congratulation. "I suppose you're counting now on getting that long flight off your mind? I regret to tell you I fear it's hull down in the distance for the two of us!"

"What! You haven't flunked, Tom? I'd never believe either of you could go back on me like that," cried the other, looking sorely distressed and bitterly disappointed.

"Circumstances over which we have no control," continued Tom, while Jack hung his head

and looked gloomy, "have arisen to knock our plans galley-west. Much as we'd be pleased to make the game, we simply can't do it."

"But the bomber is all ready and waiting!" gasped Lieutenant Beverly. "And we're having a vacation extended to us, with no red tape or strings tied to the conditions! Why, the track is cleared for the biggest flight on record, and now you tell me you'll have to drop out. See here, what's this mean? There's something queer about it all, I know."

"Just what there is, Lieutenant," remarked Jack, looking him squarely in the eye, "and it's only right you should know the reason. Tom might go along with you, but he absolutely refuses to leave me alone to fight against the slickest scoundrel living. Now listen, and I'll sketch the whole story for you."

This he proceeded to do rapidly, omitting nothing that seemed of moment. When the meddler's secret work in tampering with their plane before they went up on the night raid was mentioned, the flight lieutenant's eyes flashed with indignation. Being a pilot himself he could appreciate such rank treachery better than any layman could.

"That's how the land lies," said Jack in conclusion. "And you understand now just why we must disappoint you, and make you look else-

where for two companions on your trip to Berlin to frighten the Huns. It breaks my heart to decline, but this other matter must take my whole attention."

"You don't blame Jack, do you?" asked Tom.

"I should say not!" came the ready answer, accompanied by a keen look, first at Jack and then at the other, as a dazzling idea suddenly flashed into Beverly's mind. "Business before pleasure, every time with me; and it's only right you should devote every atom of your mind and body to beating that skunk to the post."

"We've settled on that policy all right," said Jack. "The only trouble is we haven't so far found a remedy to overcome his long lead; for he's got almost two days' run head of me, you understand."

Tom saw the lieutenant smile broadly and draw a long breath. Then something seemed to grip his heart as he heard Beverly say:

"Hold on! I've got an inspiration, boys. Perhaps there may be a way open to beat him to it yet!"

CHAPTER XI

THE AMAZING PLAN

"TELL us what you mean, please?" begged the excited Jack.

"Take things coolly, to begin with," warned the other; "because what I'm going to say will almost stun you at first, I suppose. But it's no new idea with me. Fact is, I'd planned it all out in my mind long ago; had it more than half arranged at the time I ordered that monster Martin bomber built at my own expense and shipped over to France."

"Yes," muttered Jack, while he kept his eyes glued hungrily on the flushed face of the other.

Tom said nothing, but looked as though he already half guessed what was coming, if the eager and expectant gleam in his eyes signified anything.

"I explained to you," the lieutenant continued steadily, "that the big bomber was equipped for a trip to Berlin and back; and went so far as to say the flight could be *repeated without making a*

landing, if there was any need of such a thing. All right, then; in a pinch, properly loaded with plenty of gasoline and stores, that machine would be able to take three fellows like you two and myself all the way across the Atlantic, and land us on American soil! Get that, do you, Jack?"

No one said a word for half a minute. The proposition was so astounding that it might well have appalled the stoutest heart. At that time no one had attempted to cross the Atlantic in a heavier-than-air plane, a feat later on successfully accomplished. Nobody had piloted the way in a Yankee-made seaplane; nor had any one navigated the air passage in a monster dirigible. The three thousand miles of atmosphere lying between Europe and America still stood an uncharted sea of vapor, where every imaginable evil might lie in wait for the modern Columbus of aerial navigation.

Then Jack drew a long breath. The lieutenant was watching the play of emotion across his face, and he knew the seed had been sown in good ground, where it was bound to take root. Jack's extremity would be his, Lieutenant Beverly's opportunity. So he returned to the attack, meaning to "strike while the iron was hot."

"It staggers you at first, of course, Jack," he said, in his confident, convincing way. "But why

should it? The danger is great, but nothing more than we're up against every day we set out for the clouds to give battle to a tricky Hun ace, who may send us down to our death. And I assure you we'd have at least a fighting chance to get across. What do you say, Jack?"

For answer the other whirled on his chum. His face was lighted up with that sudden and unexpected renewal of hope, just when it had seemed as though he had fallen into the pit of despair.

"Tom, would it be madness, do you think?" he cried, clutching the other by the arm, his fingers trembling, his eyes beseeching.

"We'd have a fair chance of making it, just as Colin says," Tom slowly answered. "Much would of course depend on contrary winds; and there'd be fighting in the fog banks we'd surely strike. But Jack,—"

"Yes, Tom?" gasped the other, hanging on his chum's words eagerly, as one might to the timbers of a slender bridge that offered a slim chance to reach a longed-for harbor.

"If you decide to accept the venture I'm with you!" finished Tom.

At that the eager flight lieutenant showed the utmost enthusiasm.

"Call it settled then, Jack, so we can get busy

working out the programme!" he begged, again insisting upon gripping a hand of each.

Jack found himself carried along with the current. He could not well have resisted had he so desired, which was far from being the case. It seemed to him as though he were on a vessel which had drifted for hours in the baffling fog, and then all of a sudden the veil of mist parted, to show him the friendly shore beyond, just the haven for which he was bound.

"It is, perhaps, a desperate attempt to make such a flight on short notice," Jack said. "But think! If we succeed! And think, too, of that schemer winning the prize! Yes, Tom, since you've already agreed to stand in with me, I say—*go!*"

After that a fever seemed to burn in Jack's veins, due to the sudden revulsion of feeling from despair to hope. He asked many questions, and for an hour the three talked the matter over, looking at the possibilities from every conceivable angle.

Tom was not so sanguine of success as either of his mates; but he kept his doubts to himself. As an ambitious airman he was thrilled by the vastness of the scheme. As Lieutenant Beverly had truly remarked, while it held chances of disaster, they were accepting just as many chal-

lenges to meet their death every day of their service as battleplane pilots.

Then again it seemed to be the only hope offered to poor Jack; and Tom was bound to stick by his chum through thick and thin. So he fell in with the great scheme, and listened while the flight lieutenant touched upon every feature of the contemplated flight.

Luckily it was no new idea with him, for he had spent much time and labor in figuring it all out to a fraction, barring hazards of which they could of course know nothing until they were met.

"I've got all the charts necessary," he assured them, after they had about exhausted the subject, with Jack more enthusiastic than ever. "And while you boys are waiting to receive your official notifications, which ought surely to come to-morrow, since there was a hurry mark on them, I noticed, I'll rush over to the coast and see that additional supplies of fuel and food are put aboard."

"Don't stint the gas, above everything," urged Jack. "We'd be in a pretty pickle to run out while still five hundred miles from shore. If it was only a big seaplane now, such as we hear they're building over in America, we might drop down on a smooth sea and wait to be picked up

by some ship; but with a bomber, it would mean going under in a hurry."

"Make your mind easy on that score, Jack," came the lieutenant's reply. "I'll figure to the limit, and then if the plane can carry another fifty gallons it'll go aboard in the reserve reservoir. I'm taking no chances that can be avoided. There'll be enough to bother us, most likely. And, for one, I'm not calculating on committing suicide. I hope to live to come back here aboard some ship, and see the finish of this big, exciting scrap."

Tom liked to hear him talk in that serene way. It showed that Lieutenant Colin Beverly, while a daring aviator was not to be reckoned a reckless one; and there is a vast difference between the two. Tom was of very much the same temperament himself, as was proved in past stirring incidents in his career, known to all those who have followed the fortunes of the Air Service Boys in previous books of this series.

"Is there anything else to confer about?" asked Tom. "Because I can see you're itching to get away, Colin."

"Not a thing, as far as I know," came the reply. "If any fresh idea happens to strike me I'll have it on tap when you arrive. Are you sure you've got the directions how to get to Dun-

kirk, and then how to find my secret hangar on the coast beyond the town, Tom?"

"We'll be ready to skip out just as soon as our official notice comes to hand," the other assured him.

"That's the only thing bothering me just now," observed Jack. "Any delay there might ruin our plans at the last minute. As it is, we're not apt to have any too much time to beat the steamer to New York."

"I expect you to show up to-morrow night, and then we can slip away unnoticed in the dark," said the lieutenant. "I've kept tabs on the weather conditions, as it's always been a fad with me; and I'm happy to say there seems to be no storm in prospect, while the winds are apt to be favorable, coming from the east, a rare thing these fall days. So-long, boys, and here's success to our jolly little flight!"

After he had left them Jack turned on his comrade to say:

"It seems to be our only chance, and not a long one at that; but I'm bent on trying it out. Anything to beat Randolph to the tape, Tom!"

CHAPTER XII

GRIPPED IN SUSPENSE

FROM that hour on Jack continued in a fever of suspense. His one thought was of the coming of the official notification connected with their hoped-for leave.

Tom fancied that his chum did not get much sleep on the following night, the last both of them hoped they would have to spend in the dugout used as a billet back of the American front.

So another day found them. Jack took special delight in casting up figures connected with the case. These he would show to his chum, and make various comments. Tom, realizing how the other was endeavoring to suck consolation from this proceeding, encouraged him in it.

"By to-night," Jack said, more than once, "it will be three whole days since the steamer sailed from Havre. I've tried to find out how fast she is, and then figured that they'd have to slow down when passing through the barred zone. I

reckon it will take her eight or nine days to get across."

"Oh, all of that," Tom assured him; "and it might be as many as twelve. You see, the few passenger steamers still in use haven't been in dry dock for the longest time, and their hulls must be covered with barnacles, which cuts off considerable from their speed."

Jack gave him a thankful look.

"You're the best sort of jollier, Tom," he observed. "You know how to talk to a fellow who's quivering all over with eagerness and dread. What if something happens to hold up those notices until it's too late for even Colin's big bomber to catch up with the steamer?"

"You're only borrowing trouble when you allow yourself to fear that," was the reply. "But all the same, I mean to do everything I can to get things hurried along. I'll see the general, and with your permission explain to him that there's great need of our getting word to-day."

"But, surely, you wouldn't dare hint anything about the big trip we want to take, Tom?" asked Jack, looking alarmed.

"I should say not!" came the immediate response. "If we did that, the general would consider it his duty to put his foot down on the mad scheme right away. Trust me to let him know we stand to lose out in something that

concerns your whole future if the notifications are delayed beyond early this afternoon, and I'm sure he'll start the wires going to get them here."

"What can I be doing in the meanwhile?"

"You might see to making arrangements for crossing to the coast on the first train that goes out," answered Tom.

"But that's going to be slow traveling, even if we're lucky enough to get aboard," protested the other. "Tom, do you think the general would permit us to take our machine, and fly to Dunkirk?"

"Good! That's a clever idea you've hit on, Jack!" exclaimed the other. "I'll take it up with the general when I see him. He might find it *convenient*, you know, to have some message sent across the country to the coast; and it would save us hours of time, perhaps win the race for us. A splendid thought, Jack!"

"Then let's hope it can be carried through," returned the other.

Tom did not lose any more time but hurried away to try to get an opportunity to talk with the kindly old general. He had always shown an interest in the fortunes of the two Air Service Boys, and they had already received favors from him on several occasions.

The minutes dragged while he was gone. Jack could not keep still, so nervous did he feel, but

continued walking up and down, "like a tiger in its cage," he told himself. He ran through the entire gamut of possible troubles and triumphs in his mind, as he tried to picture the whole thing.

"What great luck to have Colin Beverly break in on us just at the time when my fortunes had reached their lowest ebb," Jack kept saying to himself.

At last Tom came back. Jack could read success in his looks, even before the other had had a chance to open his mouth and say a single word.

"It's all right then, I take it, Tom?" he exclaimed impulsively.

"Didn't have any trouble at all in interesting the general," replied the messenger joyfully. "He said he'd see to having an urgent call go out to hurry the notifications along, and almost promised they'd get here by two this afternoon."

"And how about the plane business?"

"That's all settled in the bargain. I have written permission to make use of our plane, turning it over to a certain agent in Dunkirk after we've arrived there. The general will send a message over to us which we're to deliver at the same time we give up the machine."

"Great work, Tom! I've always said you'd

make a mighty fine diplomatic agent, if ever you tried, and now I know it."

"No soft-soap business, please. If it had been anybody but the general I'd have surely fallen down on my job. But you know he's always had an interest in us, Jack."

"Do you think he suspected anything?" asked the other.

"Sure he did, but not *the* thing, for nobody in the wide world would ever dream we were planning such an unheard of thing as a non-stop flight across the Atlantic."

Tom dropped his voice to a whisper when he said this; not that there seemed to be any particular need of caution, but simply on general principles. They could not afford to take any chance of having their great plan discovered in these early stages of the game.

"Well, I don't know how I'm going to hold out much longer," complained Jack. "I can't keep still five minutes, but have to jump up and walk it off. Let's see—two o'clock you said, didn't you? That'll be nearly three long hours more. It's simply terrible, Tom! Sixty minutes in each hour!"

"But then we'll have to eat our regular midday meal, remember," Tom tried to cheer his companion up by saying. "If you prefer it, we

might walk over to the field-hospital, which, by the way, I hear is to be moved ahead to-night, to keep in closer touch with the wounded straggling back from the front. The Y hut's close by, too, and we'd enjoy an hour or so with the girls. Nellie told me she expected her brother, Harry, to be back on our sector any day now, and if he should come before we clear out we'd be mighty glad to see him."

Jack hesitated.

"Gee! you do tempt a fellow, Tom," he finally remarked, as though coming to a conclusion. "Nothing I'd like better than to chat with Bessie and have a few of those Salvation Army girls' doughnuts to munch. But I guess it would be foolish in our laying off just now."

"You mean the notifications might arrive while we were gone?" remarked Tom, nodding his head, pleased because the other took such a sensible view of the matter.

"Yes. We might lose a whole hour, perhaps two, by being away," explained Jack. "That would be too bad; it might even turn out a catastrophe, if in the end that hour would save us from being beaten in the race against time."

"All right, then, we'll hang around and watch for something to come from Headquarters. The general promised me he'd have the notifications

sent over without any delay just as soon as they came."

"Let's go over to the flying field and watch some of the boys come in," suggested Jack, and to this the other readily assented.

Even when an airman is off-duty his special delight lies in "hanging out" at the aviation field, seeing his fellow workers go forth, watching their return, and listening to the many thrilling accounts of battles fought, as well as perils endured.

The fascination of the sport, once it has fairly gripped a man, makes him its slave; he can think of little else; and doubtless even in dreams he fancies himself performing unusual hazards and earning the applause of the multitude.

However this proved to be a very good panacea for Jack's nervousness and they managed to put in a full hour there. Business was unusually brisk in the way of engagements; and Tom more than once secretly regretted that circumstances beyond their control caused them to miss a "whole lot of fun."

The enemy was up in the air in more ways than one on that day. Desperation on account of the blowing up of the bridge caused the German plane scouts to meet the challenges offered by the exultant Yankees, and news of many an en-

counter kept coming in about the time the two boys thought of leaving the field and going for their dinner.

Word had also been received of several accidents to American pilots, and it looked as though the history of that eventful day would set a new high-water mark in the way of losses.

Jack even began to fear they might be ordered to go up, which would bring about a fresh delay while communication was being established with Headquarters to verify their story. So he was really glad when Tom drew him away by suggesting that it was time they dined.

At one o'clock they were at their headquarters, killing time and waiting. Jack's nerves once more began showing signs of being frayed, or "ragged," as he called it. He jumped at the least unusual sound, and alternately looked expectant and despairing.

It was now close to two o'clock, and as yet there was no sign of relief. Jack jumped up for the twentieth time and started to walk back and forth, while others among the airmen were gathering their belongings together, preparatory to a change of base.

Then a messenger was seen hurrying toward them. Jack became almost wild with excitement, until he knew for a fact the notifications had arrived.

"And now," said Tom, "let's put for the field and get away without any further loss of time. It's a long way to Dunkirk, remember, even by way of the air line, as a bee would take it. And we must get there before dark!"

They ran part of the way, and thus presented themselves before the hangar. Ample preparations had already been made. The petrol tank had been filled, and, everything being in readiness, they would have nothing to do but jump aboard and make a quick start.

But Tom was too old a pilot to take things for granted. After that recent experience with treachery he meant to be doubly careful before risking their lives in the air. Dunkirk on the Channel was a considerable distance off; and a drop when several thousand feet above French soil would go just as hard with them as if it were German territory.

Accordingly he took a survey of the plane from tip to tip of the wings; looked over the motor, tested every strut and stay, leaving nothing to Jack, who was fairly quivering with the intensity of his feelings.

Even the longest day must come to an end, and Tom's examination was finally completed.

"Get aboard!" he told Jack. "We're in great trim to make a record flight of it. And even the breeze favors us, you notice."

"Let's hope it keeps on as it is," said Jack, quickly; "because an easterly wind will help carry us on our way to-night!"

"We'll be in luck to have such help," Tom replied. "As a rule, the passage from Europe to America meets with head winds most of the way. How are you fixed, Jack?"

"All ready here, Tom."

"Half a minute more, and I'll be the same. Take your last look for some time, Jack, at the American fighting front. We'll never forget what we've met with here, and that's a fact."

"But, Tom, we expect to come back again, if all goes well," expostulated Jack. "In fact, we've just got to, or be accused of running away. We arranged all that, you remember, and how we'd manage to get across in such a way that no one will be any the wiser for our having been out of France."

"Don't let's worry about that yet," said Tom. "The first big job is to get across the Atlantic. Ready, back there? Here goes!"

Another minute, and with a rush and a roar the plane sped along the field, took an upward slant, and set out for the coast. The first leg of the great flight had actually been started!

CHAPTER XIII

OFF FOR THE CHANNEL

"Tom, do you think that spy left behind by my cousin could have learned in any way about our plan?"

They were passing over a section of Northern France, keeping a mile and more above the surface of the earth, when Jack called out in this fashion. Talking is never easy aboard a working plane. The splutter of the motor, added to the noise caused by the spinning propellers, as well as the fact that as a rule pilot and observer keep well muffled up because of the chill in the rarified air, all combine to make it difficult.

But Jack was hard to repress. Especially just then did he feel as if he must find some answer to certain doubts which were beginning to oppress him.

"There's no way of telling," Tom answered promptly. "We've already seen that the fellow is a clever, as well as desperate, rascal. He may be an American, though I'm rather inclined to

believe your cousin has found a native better suited to his needs. And such a treacherous Frenchman would prove a tricky and slippery sort. Yes, he may have overheard us say something that would put him wise to our big game."

"I hope not, I surely do," Jack continued, looking serious again. "Fact is, Tom, I'll never feel easy until we see the ocean under us."

At that Tom laughed heartily. He even put a little extra vim into his merriment in the hope of raising his chum's drooping spirits.

"That sounds mighty close to a joke, Jack, for a fact," he said.

"I'd like to know how you make that out?" demanded the other.

"Why, most people would be apt to say our troubles were likely to begin when we have cut loose from the land and see nothing below us as far as the eye can reach but the blue water of the Atlantic."

"All right," cried Jack, showing no sign of changing his mind. "I'll willingly take chances with nature rather than the perfidy and treachery of mankind. Somehow, I can't believe that we're really launched on the journey."

"Wake up then, old fellow, and shake yourself. You'll find we've made a pretty fair start. Already we've put thirty miles behind us. Unless we run up against some snag, and have en-

gine trouble, we ought to get to the Channel long before dark sets in."

So Jack relapsed into silence for a time. As he was not needed in order to run the motor or guide the plane in its progress westward, Jack could amuse himself in using the powerful binoculars.

They were at the time far removed from the earth, but through the wonderful lenses of the glasses objects became fairly distinct. So Jack could see much to interest him as they sped onward. Finally he again broke out with an exclamation.

"Nothing but the ruins of towns and villages down below, Tom," he called. "The fighting has been fierce along this sector, I should say. Why, even the woods have been smashed, and it looks like a regular desert. Poor France, what you must have suffered at the hands of those savage Huns."

"Yes," replied the pilot, over his shoulder, "here is where much of the most desperate fighting of the British took place. Some of those ruined places were beautiful French towns only a few years ago, where laces and such things were made for most of the fashionable world. Now they look about like the ruins of Ninevah or Babylon."

Fortune favored them during the next hour,

and even Jack's spirits had begun to improve. Then came a check to the sanguine nature of the outlook.

"Sorry to tell you, Jack," reported Tom, after some uneasy movements, which the other had noticed with growing alarm, "that we'll have to make a landing. After all, it's not going to be a non-stop flight to the coast. Only a little matter, but it should be looked after before it develops into serious trouble. I'm going to drop down to a lower level, where we can keep an eye out for a proper landing place."

"But that means time lost!"

"We can spare an hour if necessary, and still get to Dunkirk by evening," Tom replied cheerfully. "I was a bit suspicious of that very thing, and only for our desperate need of haste would have waited to start until it had been gone over again. But then I took chances, knowing it would, at the worst, mean only a stop for repairs. Sorry, but it can't be helped."

When the plane had reached a distance of a thousand feet above the earth, with Jack eagerly looking for a favorable landing place, the latter had managed to recover from his depression.

"I see what looks like a fine stretch, Tom," he now announced. "Notice that road looking as if it might be pitted with shell-holes? Just on its right, where that single tree trunk stands, there's

a field as level as a barn floor. Circle around, and let's get closer to it."

Further examination convinced them that they had really run upon a suitable landing place. What pleased Tom still more was the fact that so far there had been no evidence of human presence near by.

This meant that they would not be bothered during the time required for overhauling the engine by curious spectators, who might even question their right to be flying away from the front.

The landing was made in good style, and with only a few bumps, thanks to the smooth character of the field's surface. Even Jack was compelled to admit that though they had met with trouble, matters might be much worse.

"We'll get busy now, and soon have things as fit as a fiddle," said Tom, throwing off some of his superfluous garments so as to be free to work.

By this time both boys had grown to be real experts in all sorts of mechanical repairing, as every airman must of necessity become before he can pass the acid test. Unlike the driver of a car on country roads, when a break-down occurs he cannot step to a neighboring house, use the long distance or local telephone, and summon help. The airman is usually compelled to depend exclusively on his own ability to overcome the difficulty.

To get at the seat of trouble necessitated considerable disarrangement of the motor's parts. This consumed more or less time, and the minutes passing were jealously given up by the impatient Jack.

But the boys worked fast, and finally all had been accomplished. Tom tested the engine, and pronounced himself satisfied, while Jack looked over the field ahead of them.

"It's going to take us to Dunkirk without any further trouble, I give you my word for it, Jack," he said. "How long have we been here?"

"Just one hour, lacking three minutes," came the prompt reply.

"Then I'm safe," laughed Tom; "for I said within the hour. Come, pile aboard and we'll be off. Sure you examined the ground ahead, and saw to it we'd hit no bumps that might give us trouble?"

"It's all right there, Tom; could hardly be better. But be sure you don't change from a straight course, because there's a nasty shell-hole, about ten feet deep, to the left. If we struck that—good-night!"

"I notice you marked it with that pole, Jack, and I'll swing clear, you can depend on that."

They had no difficulty in making a successful ascent. Once free from the ground, the plane's nose was again turned toward the southwest. Tom had long before marked out his course, and

kept an eye on the compass as well as on his little chart.

He knew they were heading for the Channel port as straight as the crow flies. The sun was getting far down in the western sky, and it was now necessary to shield their eyes when looking ahead, on account of the dazzling glare that at times threatened to blind them.

The character of the country below had changed materially, Jack told the pilot, who seldom had a chance to look through the glasses, since his entire attention was taken up with manipulating the engine, watching its rhythmical working, and keeping the plane pushing directly on its course.

"Heine didn't get a chance to ruin things here when he passed through, going to Paris and to his smash on the Marne," Jack explained. "Towns and villages look natural, as I see them, and they must have harvested crops in those brown fields. This is a bit of the real France, and entirely different from the horrible desert we've been at work in so long."

The afternoon was wearing away. Jack frequently stared eagerly off to the west, when the sun's glowing face was veiled for a brief time by some friendly cloud. Several times he believed he could see something that looked like a stretch of water, but dared not voice his hopes.

Then came a time when a heavier cloud than

usual masked the brightness of the declining sun. Another long earnest look and Jack burst out with a triumphant shout.

"Tom, I can see the Channel, as sure as you're born!" was the burden of his announcement; and of course this caused the pilot to demand that he too be given a chance to glimpse the doubly welcome sight.

There could not be any mistake about it. Tom corroborated what Jack had declared. It was undoubtedly the English Channel they saw, showing that their journey from the American front had been successfully accomplished.

"Now for Dunkirk!" jubilantly cried Jack, looking as though he had thrown off the weight of dull care, and was once more light-hearted. "And by the same token, Tom, unless I miss my guess, that may be the city we're heading for over yonder a little further to the south."

"Then I kept my course fairly well, you'll admit," the pilot shouted at him, naturally feeling conscious of a little pride over his achievement.

Rapidly they pushed on with a slight change of course. Jack kept using the glasses and reported his observations to the busily engaged pilot.

"It'll be dusk, likely, when we land," he observed at one time. "But that doesn't cut much figure, for we can easily find our way down to Beverly's hangar on the coast. He said it was

only a few miles from town, and they'll know at the aviation field, of course."

"He gave us the name of a British officer who would post us," added Tom.

After a bit they were passing over the outskirts of Dunkirk, and making for what appeared to be an aviation field, since they could see various hangars, and another plane was just settling ahead of them.

Ten minutes passed, and Jack was delighted to find that they had made a successful landing. A number of French and British aviation men hastened to surround them, more than curious to know what strange chance had brought two Yankee fliers to Dunkirk.

Of course neither Tom nor Jack meant to afford them the least satisfaction. They had certain business to transact, and after that was off their hands the great adventure loomed beyond.

Accordingly, their first act was to find the man to whom they had been referred by Lieutenant Beverly.

"We want to see Major Denning; can anybody direct us to him?" Tom asked.

"That happens to be my name," remarked a red-faced officer on the outskirts of the crowd and who had just arrived. "What can I do for you?"

"Lieutenant Colin Beverly of the American

aviation corps referred us to you, Major," said Tom. "We have a message for you, after which we must deliver an official packet sent by our general to the command here and make arrangements to have our plane sent back to where we started from some hours ago, on the American fighting front."

"I shall be pleased to give you any assistance in my power, gentlemen," said the British major, being apparently a very agreeable and accommodating man indeed, as Beverly had informed them they would find him.

Stepping away from the crowd the Air Service Boys delivered their message, which was really a sort of prearranged password.

"Lieutenant Beverly is a cousin of mine, you know; which makes me more than anxious concerning him just now," went on Major Denning, after these formalities had been gone through with.

"Why so, Major?" demanded Tom, while Jack looked worried.

Whereupon the red-faced major drew them still further to one side, and, lowering his heavy voice so as not to be overheard by others, went on to say:

"I, as you know, know something about that wonderful big bomber he's had sent over, and how he means to give Berlin a scare shortly. I've

even had the privilege of looking the monster over, and feeling a thrill at picturing how it would give the Huns a fright when it appeared over Berlin. But you see its presence here is a secret, and known to but few of us."

"Glad to hear it, Major," Tom remarked. "But please explain why you are worried about Beverly."

"That is," continued the officer, "because an explosion was heard, coming from the south, just a short time ago. Everybody believes it must be the airdrome sheltering the dirigible Britain sent over here for use, and which lies further down the coast. But, much as I hate to say it, I fear something serious has happened to Beverly's hangar; in fact that a bomb has destroyed it, or else some rank Hun treachery has been at work there!"

CHAPTER XIV

READY FOR THE START

"Just our beastly luck!" gasped Jack, turning white with apprehension.

"Wait, we haven't any proof as yet," advised Tom. "The Major himself admits that he's only afraid it may have been Beverly's hangar. Hasn't anything been done to learn the truth, sir?"

"Oh, yes," came the quick reply. "A number of cars have gone down that way, but the road's in a shocking condition, and up to now none of them has returned to advise us. I'd be very sorry if it turned out as I fear, doubly so if Beverly himself were injured or killed, because I'm fond of the chap, don't you know."

"Let's hope everything is all right," said Tom, as composedly as possible. "And first of all I'd like to get through the business part of our errand here. I have the packet to deliver for our general. Then the machine must be turned over to a representative of our Government here.

After all that's attended to we'll strike out for the Beverly hangar."

"I'll be pleased to take you there personally, if you like," remarked Major Denning.

"And we'll accept your offer with thanks, sir. It is very kind of you," said Tom, at the same time wondering what the other would say when he made the astounding discovery that the object of the expedition was even more ambitious than a mere flight to Berlin and back; that indeed the daring adventurers meant to attempt a record voyage across the Atlantic by air such as would vie with that of Columbus.

Jack fell into a fever of suspense again, and counted the minutes that must be consumed in carrying out the business in hand. Tom was exceedingly scrupulous concerning this.

"The general was kind enough to give us a good push on our way here," he told Jack, when the latter continued to fret and hint about "cutting off corners" in order to hasten their getting away. "We're bound to do our part of the job right up to the handle. Besides, what do ten or twenty minutes amount to?"

When Tom announced himself satisfied night had settled on the land. Dunkirk had for long been annoyed by the fire of a long-range monster gun, shells dropping into the city at stated intervals for weeks at a time.

So, too, hostile airplanes had hovered over the Channel port, trying to make it unpleasant for the British Tommies in camp near by. But since Marshal Foch opened operations on a large scale, together with the furious drive of General Pershing's army, this had altogether ceased.

Major Denning had a car at their disposal.

"It will take us to a place where we can leave the road and follow a path to the beach," he told them. "Beverly has quite a force of men there looking after things, which fact makes me hope nothing could have happened to injure or destroy that wonderful bomber. But we've been pestered to death with Hun bounders playing spy, and I'd put nothing past them."

They set out, and were soon on the way. Major Denning had a man at the wheel, evidently his chauffeur, for he was a British private. He knew the road, and managed to steer clear of the obstructions that continually cropped up.

"Seems to me those Hun pilots must have dropped most of their bombs out this way, instead of hitting the town or the camps," Tom suggested, as they dodged to and fro, and often suffered severe bouncings.

"No man-power to make any road repairs, in the bargain," explained the officer. "Since the drive has been on we are sending every British battalion we can muster forward. These things

can wait until the German is licked, which we all believe is coming shortly, with Marshall Haig and General Pershing and General Petain on the job."

"Wow! what's that mean?" cried Jack, half jumping up as the sound of several shots not far away came distinctly to their ears.

"Did those shots seem to be over yonder to the right?" asked the major.

"So far as I was able to judge that's where they came from," Tom replied. "Does the hangar lie in that quarter, sir?"

"Just what it does! There's certainly something strange going on around there to-night. But we'll quickly learn for ourselves, because the spot where we leave the road is just ahead of us."

Jack was the first out; indeed the car had not wholly come to a stand before he made a flying jump. Leaving the chauffeur to watch the car, the major soon found the trail. He carried a small hand electric torch with him, a vest-pocket size, but at least with a ray sufficiently strong to dissipate the gloom under the brush and to show them what seemed to be a well defined trail.

"We may find ourselves made a target by some of his wideawake guards. That they are on the alert those shots we heard a bit ago seem to testify," suggested Major Denning.

"Oh, we'll use the signal whistle; and I feel sure Lieutenant Beverly himself will be listening to catch it, for he expects us any minute now."

"We're getting close enough just now to exercise due caution, at any rate," the guide answered in a whisper.

Taking the hint, Tom commenced giving the signal. It was a short sharp whistle, four times repeated. Hardly had Tom sounded this than they heard an answer.

"Fine!" exclaimed Jack. "He's here on deck, and perhaps everything may be all right yet."

They continued along the path, and Tom repeated his whistling. Finally the figure of a man loomed up beyond.

"That you, Tom, Jack?" came a voice.

"Hello, Beverly!" Jack burst out impulsively. "We've come all the way by air. What's going on around here; nothing serious happened, I hope?"

"Rest easy on that score, boys," the other replied, still advancing.

"Then the machine is still ready for business, is it?" cried Jack.

"In apple-pie order, down to the last drop of juice, and ready to do the builders proud. But I'm mighty glad to see you, boys, I surely am. Afraid there'd be some hitch at the last minute from your end."

"And," said Tom, wringing the other's hand, "Jack has been picturing all sorts of terrible things happening to you and the plane here, near Dunkirk. He's as happy as a clam at high tide right now, I assure you."

"You bet I am!" Jack cried explosively, gripping the fingers of the lieutenant with great enthusiasm.

"Why, hello! who's this but my English cousin, Major Denning?" cried Beverly, discovering that his two chums were not alone.

"Thought it best to steer them to you, and take no chances of a miss," explained the officer. "Besides, to tell you the truth, I fancied seeing you start off on your long contemplated trip to wake up Berlin. Once I was in hopes I might even have the opportunity of accompanying you. I've a score to settle with the beast for knocking a hole in my London house and frightening my aunt almost into fits. At least you'll let me wish you *bon voyage*, Beverly."

Tom said nothing. He realized that the major had no inkling of the real purpose of the flight about to be undertaken; and if he was to be told the facts the information must come from Lieutenant Beverly himself.

"Oh! By the way, that Berlin trip will have to wait," chuckled the lieutenant, making up his mind that a clean breast of the whole matter must

follow. "Fact is, Major, we're after larger game than that would prove to be; something calculated to stagger you a bit, I think."

"You're certainly puzzling me by what you say, Colin," declared the major, betraying a growing curiosity in voice and manner. "I'd like to know for a fact what you could call larger game than a non-stop flight to Berlin and back, starting from the Channel here. Are you planning a trip to the moon, after Jules Verne's yarn?"

"No. But something that has as yet never been attempted," came the steady reply. "It is a flight across the Atlantic to America in the big bomber plane, and starting this very night!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE LONG FLIGHT BEGUN

MAJOR DENNING was greatly astonished when Lieutenant Beverly made so astounding an assertion.

"Well, I wouldn't put anything past you Yankees," he presently remarked, with a dry chuckle. "But this is something of a Herculean task you're planning, Colin. A flight of over three thousand miles is a greater undertaking than any plane has so far been able to carry through. And if you should meet with trouble, the jig is up with you all!"

"We understand what we're up against, I assure you," Tom replied. "The plan is entirely Lieutenant Beverly's, sir. Sergeant Parmly has reason to get home before the *La Bretagne* reaches New York harbor, and she's already three days out. Learning this, our good friend here made a thrilling proposition, which we eagerly accepted. That's the story in a nutshell, Major Denning."

"I must say I admire your nerve, that's all,"

exploded the other, shaking hands with all of them. "Just the type of chap I'd like to tie up with. My word! if I could get leave, and there was room for one more aboard the big bomber, I'd beg of you to take me in. But I wish you every luck in the wide world. My word, fancy the nerve of it!"

"We must remember not to speak a word so that any of the men can guess what our real destination is," Beverly cautioned, as they continued along the path. "Only my right-hand agent here knows the truth, and he means to keep it dark."

"But they must suspect something unusual," suggested Tom.

"It's hinted that we are aiming at Berlin, don't you know?" pursued the lieutenant, chuckling. "But believe me, the game is a bigger one than just that little jaunt, far bigger in fact."

Presently they came to the shore where the stout hangar was found, partly hidden under the branches of low trees and shrubbery. Before them lay the sandy stretch of beach hard as a dancing floor, and well fitted to be their "jumping off" place.

Tom bent down to feel it, after the manner of an experienced air pilot.

"Couldn't be bettered much, could it, Tom?" demanded Lieutenant Beverly confidently.

"I should say not!" was the quick response.

Jack was feeling quite joyous since the outlook for starting on the anticipated flight had become so bright. At the same time he told himself he would not entirely lose that tense sensation around the region of his heart until they were actually off.

Around the hangar they found a cordon of several armed men; a fact which caused Tom to remember that they shortly before had heard the report of firearms, and as yet had failed to learn the cause. Then again there was that explosion down the coast. He turned to Lieutenant Beverly for an explanation.

"We too heard the sound of an explosion," Beverly told him in reply. "It came from further down the shore. There's some sort of British airdrome in that quarter, I'm informed; and possibly they had an accident there. As for the shooting, that's easily explained. My men were the cause."

"Spies hanging around, probably?" hazarded the major, in disgust. "We've been bothered with the slick beasts right along—shot several, but even that didn't keep the coast clear."

"There have been skulkers around for some time," continued the lieutenant. "Baxter tells me he'd warned them off until he grew tired, and threatened that the next one who was caught try-

ing to peep would be fired upon. So to-night when a sentry reported suspicious movements in the brush we sent in a few shots, more to give them a scare than to do any damage."

"Have they tried to injure your plane, Colin?" asked the major.

"I understand that once my men discovered a fire had been started in a mysterious way, which they succeeded in putting out. Only for prompt work it would have at least disabled the bomber so that its usefulness for the present would be nil."

"The ways of those German spies are past finding out," complained Major Denning. "They seem to take a page from Indian tactics, and resort to all species of savage warfare. It wouldn't surprise me if you found they had shot an arrow with a blazing wad of saturated cotton fastened to its head, and used your hangar as a target. History tells us your redskins used to do something like that in the days of the early colonies."

Shortly afterwards the monster bombing plane was wheeled out of its hangar, and became an object of vast interest to the two Air Service Boys.

Tom and Jack were of course familiar with its working, but needed a few hints from Lieutenant

Beverly with respect to certain new features that it possessed.

"What do you think of it, boys?" was the natural question asked by the intrepid flight commander, who of course meant to do his share of the handling of the giant plane during its long flight.

"A jim-dandy! That's what!" exclaimed the delighted Jack, almost awed by the tremendous size of the up-to-date machine, with its wonderful expanse of planes and its monster body in which the vast amount of stores, as well as surplus gasoline, could be stowed.

"I'm confident we'll have more than a fighting chance to reach the objective we have in view," Tom in his turn remarked; and even though the men standing near must have heard what he said they could not possibly suspect the truth that lay back of his words.

"Everything has been looked after, and right now there's not a single item lacking," Lieutenant Beverly assured them. "Mention what you please, and I defy you to find I've overlooked it. I notice that you have brought your glasses along, Jack. I have a fine pair with me, but we can doubtless use both."

"And on my part," added Tom, "I thought it wise to carry a few small nicknacks that I've

become attached to. They ought to share my fortunes. If I cash in, my reliable old compass here, for instance, wouldn't be valued highly by any one else; but it's saved my life more than a few times."

"And may again," said Jack softly; "for those fogs are simply dreadful, if half that's said about them turns out to be true."

Tom was stooping down and feeling the firm sandy beach.

"A splendid place to make our start, Lieutenant," he remarked.

"I selected it with that idea in view," explained the other. "Besides, in a long trip, like the run to Berlin, this would be as desirable a station as any. What do you think of the plane, Tom?"

"As well as I can see it, I am satisfied it will be all you told us," Tom answered him, while Jack added:

"Same here."

Certainly, as seen spread out on the almost level stretch of hard sand the monster bombing plane did have a powerful appearance that must favorably impress any experienced pilot. Tom and Jack had noted several things about it calculated to inspire confidence. They were taking tremendous risks, of course, but then that was nothing novel in their lives as aviators.

"Is there anything to delay us further?" asked Jack naively, feeling that even minutes might count when the issue was so plainly outlined.

"I do not know of the slightest reason," admitted Lieutenant Beverly, moving toward the bombing plane and followed by his two comrades. "And that being the case, let's get aboard. Anything like a written message you would like to leave behind, to be sent in case we are never heard from again, boys? You can give it to my cousin, the major here, who will attend to it."

Both Tom and Jack had thought of this long before, and each had prepared a simple statement which would explain their fate in case they met with disaster on the flight. These sealed and directed envelopes they now handed to Major Denning.

"Depend on me to hold them until all doubt is past," he told them, as he warmly pressed a hand of each.

Then Lieutenant Beverly gave the word to his men, and immediately the hum of the giant motors announced that they were off on their amazing trip to span the Atlantic, as it had never been done before, by way of the air!

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRST NIGHT OUT

It was with a strange feeling of exhilaration that Tom and Jack realized the fact that at last they were embarked on a flight that would either bring about their death or, if successful, make a record in long distance non-stop travel in a heavier-than-air machine.

The cheers of the men on the beach had been drowned in the roar of the powerful motors and twin propellers when they left the land and commenced to sweep upward in a graceful curve.

Both boys looked down to catch the last glimpse of France, the land so closely associated with liberty in the minds of all true Americans. It was in her cause two million young Yankees were at that very hour facing the Boche in a determined effort to chase him back over the Rhine and force a stern settlement for all the devastation his armies had wrought.

Quickly did the darkness blot out all trace of land. Back some little distance, it was true, they

could still glimpse feeble lights, marking the location of Dunkirk. The French no longer feared to illuminate to a limited extent since bombing planes no longer came raiding at night, nor did that unseen monster Krupp cannon deliver its regular messages of bursting shells.

Below them lay the English Channel, and Lieutenant Beverly had so shaped the course that as they rose higher and higher they were heading directly across, with the eastern shore of England close enough to have afforded them a view of the land had it not been night-time.

They had discussed all this many times, and settled on what seemed the most feasible route. Of course, it might have been a much shorter distance had they decided to head almost south-west-by-south, making for the Azores, and stopping there to prepare for another flight across to Newfoundland. Going that way, they would have had the benefit of the general easterly winds. But this did not appeal to Tom and Jack for several good reasons. In the first place, it meant that a landing at the Azores would be reckoned of such importance that it must be heralded far and near. This was apt to get them into trouble with the military authorities, since they had received no *bona fide* permission to leave the soil of France; at least, to return to America.

Then again Jack was opposed to the plan for

the reason that if they should land at the extreme point of Newfoundland considerable delay must be caused by the difficulty of getting transportation to the States. All the while Randolph Carringford would be steadily moving on, and, landing at New York, have an advantage over Jack.

There was also a third reason that influenced the young navigators in deciding to take the longer course across the Atlantic. This concerned the fogs such as can always be met with off the Newfoundland Banks, and which are often so dense that vessels flounder through them for several days at a stretch.

By taking the southern course, and steering direct for the Virginia shore they would be likely to miss much of this trouble, even though it was a time of year when heavy mists hang along the entire Atlantic seaboard.

All of them were silent for some little time, only the roar of the motor and the propellers beating in their ears. Beverly had established a method of communication when in flight without unduly straining the voice. It was very similar to a wireless telephone outfit which Tom and Jack had employed not long back, and by the use of which they could actually talk with an operator similarly equipped, even if standing on the earth a mile below their plane.

It was arranged for all three of them, and could be removed from the head when no communication was desired. In the beginning they were not in the mood to make use of this contrivance, which, however, would undoubtedly be welcome later on, when they would be passing over the apparently limitless sea and the monotony had begun to wear upon their nerves. Then conversation might relieve the tension.

It was Jack who presently called out:

"I can see lights below us. Do you think we've crossed the Channel, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, that's the English shore, and doubtless Dover lies directly below us, although we're at such a height that it's impossible to make sure."

"What's the idea of keeping so high, Lieutenant?" continued Jack.

"Simply to avoid collision with any of the coast guard fliers, who might take us for Huns meaning to attack London again after a long break. But Jack, I'm going to ask a favor of you."

"Go to it then!" called out the other, who was plainly "on edge" with excitement over the wonderful fact that they were at last on their way.

"Drop that formality from this time on," said Beverly earnestly. "Forget that I happen to rank you, for I'm sure your commissions are only delayed in the coming. From now on let it

be either plain Colin, or if you prefer, Beverly. We're three chums in a boat—a ship of the air, to be exact—and all ranking on a level. You'll agree to that, won't you, Jack?"

"You bet I will, Colin, and it's just like you to propose it!" cried the pleased Jack.

After that they fell silent again, though now and then Jack, who was making good use of the night-glasses, announced that they seemed to be passing over some city.

Tom had studied their intended course so thoroughly that he was able to tell with more or less accuracy what some of those places were. In so doing he always kept in mind the probable speed at which the big plane was traveling.

They had veered a little, and would not come anywhere near Liverpool or Dublin, as Jack had suspected might be the case until he looked over the chart Tom had marked. On the contrary, their new course would carry them over the south of England, and just cut across the lower part of Ireland; indeed, the latter might have been skipped entirely with profit to themselves in miles gained, only it seemed natural they should want to keep in touch with land just as long as possible.

How steadily the giant plane moved majestically through the realms of space several miles above the earth! Tom found himself fascinated

by the working of the motors from the very minute he first heard them take up their steady labor. Surely, if the feat were at all within the bounds of possibilities, they had, as Lieutenant Beverly said, "a fighting chance."

Of course there was always impending danger. Any one of a score of accidents was liable to happen, especially after the engines had been constantly working hour after hour.

Such things may bother an aviator when over the enemy's country, because if a landing seems necessary in order to avoid a fatal drop, there must always arise the risk of capture. How much more serious would even the smallest engine trouble become, once they were far out over the ocean with nothing in sight as far as the eye could reach save an endless vastness of rolling waters beneath, and passing clouds overhead?

Tom, however, would not allow himself to brood upon these possibilities, and when they flashed across his mind he persistently banished them. Sufficient to the day was the evil thereof; and if difficulties arose they must meet them bravely, doing the best they could, and accepting the results in the spirit of Columbus, who was the pioneer in spanning the Atlantic.

Jack now made a discovery that caused him to call out again.

"I believe we've left the land again, and it's

water down under us right now, fellows!" he called shrilly, his voice sounding above the clamor by which they were continually surrounded.

"Well, according to my calculations," said Tom, "we should be about quit of England and striking the Irish Sea at its junction with the Atlantic. It's that you believe you see right now."

"Then before long we'll glimpse Ireland's lights!" cried the exultant Jack. "Though we're likely to pass over only the city of Cork as we dash on for the big sea beyond. So far everything is moving like grease, Lieu—Colin."

"I promised you it would," the pilot told him. "And let's hope it keeps up this way all the way through."

Again they ceased trying to talk since it proved such an effort without resorting to the little wireless telephone arrangement. Jack did notify them, however, when he believed he sighted tiny specks far below that he took for the lights of some place of consequence; but Tom, who knew better, assured him he must be mistaken.

"You're straining your eyes so much you mistake other things for lights, Jack," he told the observer. "It might even be the reflection of the stars on the glasses of your binoculars. We're not near Cork yet, and there's no other place worth mentioning that we'll come near. Rest up, Jack."

"Plenty of time for that after we've struck out over the ocean," came Jack's defiant answer.

Later on he again declared he saw lights. They had been speeding for some hours at a rate of more than sixty miles, which was good time for one of those monster heavily laden bombers to make.

"Yes, I imagine it's Cork this time," said Tom, when appealed to. "We veer to the left here, and pass out to sea over Queenstown, don't we, Colin?"

"According to our mapped-out plan that's the course," came the reply, as the pilot shifted his levers, and headed a little more toward the south.

Their sensations at that particular time were very acute. It was as if they had reached the dividing line, and were about to enter upon a course that would admit of no turning back.

"There, the last glimmer of light has disappeared!" finally cried Jack in an awed tone, "and we're heading out over the Atlantic, bound for America!"

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN THE SUBMARINE STRUCK

It was long past midnight.

In fact, the aviators could expect to see dawn break before a great while. When that event came about they knew what an appalling spectacle must greet their wondering eyes. Above, the boundless expanse of blue sky, with fleecy little white clouds passing here and there, looking like islands in a sea of azure; below, an unending sea of tossing waves, with perhaps not even a fishing vessel in sight.

Jack fell asleep, being utterly tired out. Tom too caught what he called little "cat-naps" from time to time. Beverly stuck faithfully to his post, for not a wink of sleep could come to one in whose hands the destinies of the whole expedition lay.

So the minutes passed, bringing them ever nearer the breaking of another day. The immensity of their undertaking no longer appalled them. It was too late for consideration anyway,

since they were now fully launched upon the flight, and turning back was not to be thought of.

Jack, waking out of a nap, looked down, and immediately uttered a loud cry.

"Why, it's getting daylight, and you can glimpse the ocean! How queer it looks, fellows, to be sure! Is everything going well, Colin?"

"Couldn't be improved on," he was assured by the faithful pilot.

"First I must use the glasses to see how it looks at closer range," Jack continued. "Then I think we ought to have breakfast. This cold air makes a fellow as hungry as a wolf. I think I must have lost myself for a bit."

Tom did not say anything, only smiled, but he knew that the other had enjoyed at least a full hour of sleep.

"How far are we from land, Tom, would you say?" next asked the observer, while he was adjusting the glasses to his eyes.

"Possibly a hundred and fifty miles, perhaps nearer two hundred," Tom assured him, in a matter-of-fact tone, as though that was only what might be expected.

"Hello! I can see a vessel already, and heading into the west!" declared Jack. "Of course I can't make out what she's like, though I bet you her hull and funnels are camouflaged to beat the band, so as to fool those Hun submarine pirates

with the stripes of black and white. You don't think it's possible that could be the *La Bretagne*, Tom?"

"Well, hardly," came the quick reply, "unless something happened to detain the French steamer after she left Havre days ago. She ought to be a whole lot further along than this boat is. She must be some small liner from Liverpool or Southampton, making for Halifax or New York."

Jack presently tired of staring at the little speck far down below.

"I wonder if they can see us with a glass," he next observed, as Tom began to hand out bread and butter, with hard-boiled eggs or ham between, and some warm coffee kept in Thermos bottles so as to take the chill of the high altitudes out of their bodies.

"Not a chance in a hundred," Beverly assured him. "Besides, those aboard the steamer are devoting all their efforts to watching for enemies in the water, and not among the clouds."

They munched their breakfast and enjoyed it immensely. Indeed it seemed as though they devoured twice as much as upon ordinary occasions.

"Lucky we laid in plenty of grub!" Jack declared, when finally all of them announced that they were satisfied. "This Atlantic air makes

one keep hungry all the time. Now I can see that steamer plainly, for we've dropped a little lower. Oh! What can that mean?"

His voice had a ring of sudden alarm about it that instantly aroused Tom's curiosity. Even Lieutenant Beverly looked over his shoulder as though he, too, felt a desire to learn more.

"They seem to be firing guns!" continued Jack presently. "Of course we're far too high to hear the sound, but I can see the smoke as sure as I'm sitting here. Can it be they're being attacked by a Hun undersea boat, do you think, boys?"

"Such things keep on happening right along in these shark-infested waters," replied Tom. "Go on and tell us all you see, Jack!"

They were all of them thrilled by the consciousness that possibly a grim tragedy of the sea was being enacted directly beneath, without any likelihood of their being able to render succor to those who might soon be in distress.

"They keep on firing," Jack continued. "I can see each puff of smoke belch out. There, something has happened! I believe it was a torpedo that exploded against the hull of the steamer, for I saw a great blotch rise up, and men are running about the decks like mad!"

Beverly had almost automatically decreased their speed, as though inclined to hover above the

ill-fated vessel as long as possible, at least to learn what followed.

"They seem to be making signals!" Jack presently cried out.

"Look around and see if you can glimpse anything coming on!" demanded Tom, as though suspecting the cause of this fresh announcement.

Hardly had the one who gripped the binoculars started to do as he was requested than he gave a cry of mingled relief and satisfaction.

"Two boats racing straight for the spot, boys! Destroyers, too! Like as not Americans, for they keep lying out here, you know, to protect our transports going over with the boys. How they do cut through the water with their sharp bows and make the waves fly! But that steamer looks as if she might be sinking right now!"

The excitement grew intense. Beverly even started to circle around, content to lose a few miles and some minutes if only he could satisfy their minds that all was well with the unfortunate steamer that had been so ruthlessly torpedoed without warning by the undersea pirates.

"They're coming up like fun!" cried Jack presently. "I can't see as well as I'd like, though, on account of the sea fog that keeps drifting along in patches like clouds. I really believe they'll get up before she founders. Now the

crew have started putting off boats to make sure of saving the passengers if the worst comes!"

"Which shows they have a capable captain aboard," commented Tom.

"But the sea must be pretty rough," continued Jack, "because the small boats toss and pitch sharply as they start away from the steamer. Hang that fog, it's going to shut the whole picture out soon. But there, one of the destroyers has arrived, and the boats are heading straight on to it."

A minute later Jack gave them another little batch of news.

"The other destroyer is circling around, and must be looking for signs of the sub. Wow! that was a terrible waterspout, though. And there goes a second one!"

"They're dropping depth bombs, intending to get the slinker!" announced Beverly jubilantly.

"Here's hoping they do then!" cried Jack, and immediately afterwards added: "But it's all over for us, boys, because the fog's shut it off completely. Might as well get along on our way; but I'm happy to know those Yankee boats came up in time to save everybody aboard the steamer. What a bully view we had of the performance!"

"It's such things that are apt to break the monotony and routine of a long flight like the one we've undertaken," remarked Tom. "In

time, of course, the dash across the Atlantic will become quite common; and those who make it are apt to see wonderful sights."

"Two hundred miles out," Jack was saying to himself as he sat there still holding the glasses in his hand, though not attempting to make use of them, and his eyes ranged longingly toward the western horizon where the blue of the sky touched the dark green of the boundless sea, all his thoughts centered on the goal that lay far distant across that vast waste of tumbling waters.

So as the sun started to climb in the eastern heavens the flight of the big bombing plane carrying the trio of adventurous ones was continued, every mile left behind bringing them that much nearer their destination, with the future still an unsolved problem.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COLD HAND OF FEAR

Noon came and went, with the same steady progress being maintained hour after hour. Tom relieved Beverly at the pilot's berth, and the latter succeeded in getting some much needed rest. Still, none of them could sleep comfortably, which was hardly to be wondered at considering their strange surroundings.

"My first nap when flying, for a fact!" admitted Colin, after he had awakened, and managed to stretch his stiffened limbs.

"Tough work trying to get a few winks of sleep when one is quivering all over with excitement," Jack remarked.

They were no longer maintaining such a high course, having descended until the heaving sea lay not more than a thousand feet below. Nothing was in sight in any direction, which was one reason for Tom's dropping down as he did.

"A lot of water," Jack commented, for they had started to try out the wonderful little wire-

less telephone, to find that it really worked splendidly. "Guess after the flood Noah must have thought that way too. But shucks! we haven't got even a dove to send out."

"We happen to have something better," Tom told him, "which is the power to shoot our boat through space at the rate of a mile a minute. No ark business about this craft."

"Well, is there any objection to breaking our fast again?" the other inquired, changing the subject.

Beverly seemed to think not, for he proceeded to get out the hamper in which much of their prepared food was contained.

"I laid in double the quantity I expected we'd devour," he told them, "and then added something to that for good measure. No telling what may crop up; and if we happen to be cast on a desert island a healthy lot of grub might come in handy."

"It does right now, when we are far from any island, unless that's one up there in that dark cloud floating above us," and Jack stretched out to receive his portion of the lunch as parceled out by Colin.

"One thing that made me drop to a lower level," explained Tom, "was the fact of its being so cold up there among the clouds. Already I feel better for the change."

"How about it if we should sight a steamer?" asked Jack. "They'd report meeting a plane flying west here in midocean, which would stir up no end of comment in the papers, and might lead to our being found out."

"We depend on you to keep the glasses in use, and report anything in sight ahead," laughed Tom; for the clatter of the motors did not seem to bother them in the least when using the wireless telephone. "And when you sing out 'smoke down low on the horizon to the west!' it's going to be an easy job for us to climb up above the clouds in a hurry."

So it was settled, and they ate their lunch in comfort.

Up to that time not the slightest thing had arisen to give them concern with regard to the working of the engines. These aroused the admiration of the three voyagers by their remarkable performance. Tom declared their equal had never been installed in any plane that was ever built, and Lieutenant Beverly's eyes glowed with satisfaction to hear his pet praised so cordially by one whose good opinion he valued as highly as he did Tom Raymond's.

After Jack had taken his turn at piloting the machine, he amused himself "between naps" by watching the surface of the sea through the binoculars.

"No telling but what I may glimpse a submarine creeping along under the surface," he told the others jokingly. "Then wouldn't we wish we'd brought along a few bombs—the kind they dropped on that Hun bridge the night we went with the raiders. Right now I could almost imagine that shark's dorsal-fin was a periscope belonging to an undersea boat."

Other things came along to cause momentary interest, among them rolling porpoises that rose in sight, and then vanished under the waves, though from their height the boys could easily follow their movements.

Jack was getting a good deal of enjoyment out of the situation, and Tom was glad to notice this fact. He had feared his chum's nerves might give way under the long-continued strain; but apparently Jack had returned to his ordinary condition.

All of them rather dreaded the coming of night. Flying in midocean while daylight lasted was serious enough, but with darkness around for many hours, the situation must awaken new anxieties.

But their hearts were still apparently undaunted. The success that had rewarded their bold starting out gave abundant promise of still better things ahead. Tom resolutely refused to allow himself to have any fear. What if two thousand miles still lay between them and the

goal of their hopes? Was not the miracle-worker of a monster plane doing remarkably fine work, and should they not continue to believe the end justified the means?

So they watched the sun dropping lower and lower in the western sky without any one voicing the thought that must have been in each mind. The same inscrutable Providence that had watched over them by day would still guard them when the light was gone. Under the stars, seeming now so much nearer and brighter than when ashore, they went on and on, until back in the east another day dawned, the great day of hope for them!

Jack had taken to looking eagerly ahead once more.

"What do you think you see?" Beverly asked him, for Tom again served as pilot at the steering gear.

"Why, I'm all mixed up about it," came the slow reply. "It certainly isn't a steamer, and again it just can't be land!"

"Well, hardly," Beverly answered. "To tell the honest truth I don't believe there's a foot of land closer to us than the Bermudas, which must lie off in that direction," pointing further toward the southwest.

"When the sun glints on it I'm fairly dazzled," Jack continued, "just as if some one had used a piece of broken looking-glass to shoot the rays

into my eyes. And then there's a sort of queer mist hanging about that thing in the bargain, so that sometimes it's almost blotted out. What under the sun can it be?"

"I think I can give a guess," Tom called back. "How would an iceberg fill the bill, Colin?"

"Just the thing, I'd say," the lieutenant answered, "only who ever heard of an iceberg floating down in mid-Atlantic at this season of the year? Such a thing would be uncommon, to say the least."

"But not impossible?" ventured Tom, to which the other agreed.

"Take a look, and tell us, Colin," urged Jack, offering the glasses.

A minute afterwards they were handed back again.

"Just what it is, Tom, after all," reported Beverly. "A pretty tall berg it seems to be, with an extensive ice-floe around it as level in spots as a floor. I thought I saw something move on it that might be a Polar bear, caught when the berg broke away from its Arctic glacier. We will pass directly over, and may be able to feel the chill."

"It was the *Titanic,* wasn't it, that bumped into an iceberg, and went down with such a frightful loss of life?" remarked Jack.

"No other," replied Tom. "But we'll try to

make sure nothing like that happens to our frail craft. Try to guess what would happen to that monster berg if we hit head on?"

"Hardly a crack!" Jack retorted. "But I'm more interested in wondering what would become of us. Guess we'd better keep a good thousand feet up, and not bother trying to pry into the ice-floe's secrets."

"I'm not dreaming of dropping a foot lower just at present," Tom said decisively; and not one of them dreamed how soon that decision would have to be reversed, since all still looked fair about them, with no storm in sight and the wonderful motors kept up their regular pulsations as if capable of going on forever.

Yet strange vicissitudes and changes are the portion of those who follow the sea; which may also be applied to other voyagers of space, the sailors of the air. One minute all seems fair, with the sun shining; another, and a white squall is dashing down upon the ship, to catch the crew unawares and perhaps smother them with its mighty foam-crested billows.

It was not half an hour later when something happened that was calculated to chill the hearts of those bold navigators, such as even close contact to the ice-floe and berg could never bring about.

At the time they had reached a point almost

above the field of ice from the Arctic regions, and Jack was scrutinizing its full extent, commenting the while on many peculiar features that attracted his attention.

"It's a Polar bear, all right, fellows," he announced, "and believe me he's some size in the bargain. If I had a rifle along I wouldn't mind dropping down there and rustling him. But what ails you, Tom? You seem bothered about something. Gee! you're as white as a ghost!"

Lieutenant Beverly leaned forward and clutched the pilot's arm.

"Anything gone wrong with the motors, Tom?" he demanded hoarsely.

"I've just made a terrible discovery," replied Tom, trying to control himself. "The worst has happened, and I'm afraid we're in for a bad time!"

CHAPTER XIX

A DESPERATE CHANCE

"TELL us the worst, Tom!" cried Beverly hoarsely.

Jack tried to echo the words, but his tongue seemed to stick to the roof of his mouth. He knew his chum well enough to feel assured that no ordinary hovering peril could cause the other to look so ashen pale. It must be a frightful catastrophe by which they were threatened, Jack realized.

"The feed pipe! It must be choking up! Latterly I've more than suspected the motors were doing poorer work than before!"

The others understood. Under ordinary conditions they would decide on dropping to the ground for repairs; a task that might be carried out in a brief time, or consume hours, everything depending on the condition in which they found things.

But how utterly impossible to dream of doing anything like that now! Jack looked down to

where, in the declining light of the sun, he could see that limitless sea of billowy water. How different indeed all might be were their airship a seaplane, capable of floating on the surface of the water and making a successful launch from it, just as a gull would do.

"I'll take a look, Tom!" Lieutenant Beverly called out. "Not that I doubt what you say, but all of us will have to put our heads together; we shall need all our wits if what you fear proves to be a fact."

Tom was more than willing, in fact he would have himself insisted on the lieutenant or Jack doing this very thing. Pilots differ in plenty of ways; and, as Beverly had said, one might hit on an answer to the problem that had entirely escaped the others.

Jack said not a word, but almost held his breath while Beverly was making his eager examination. The plane was not more than a thousand feet above the sea at most, and going very slowly now.

A short time elapsed. Then Beverly completed his task. The flight lieutenant looked more serious than ever, which told the story even before he uttered a single word.

Apparently the worst had come, and they were up against a question on the answer to which everything, even life itself, depended.

"I'm sorry to say it's a positive fact, boys!" called out Beverly, and as both the others were straining their ears to catch what he said, they had no difficulty in hearing every word.

"It's the supply pipe clogging then?" Tom asked.

"Yes," came the quick answer. "And while under some conditions I've been able to get along for a short time without dropping down, as a rule I've found it wise to look for a landing-place before things got to the point of desperation and avoid a fall, possibly in the midst of a German battalion."

"No chance of our getting at it while afloat, is there?" Jack asked, although he knew what Beverly was bound to say.

"Not the slightest," the other shot back. "It might keep going for something like an hour, and then shut off the gas entirely. Of course there's always a possibility of a miracle happening, such as the obstruction being suddenly overcome; but I'm afraid that's one chance in a million."

"But can't something be done, boys? Must we just fold our hands, and meet our fate?" demanded Jack. "What are you thinking about, Tom, for I can see a look in your face that we ought to know? Have you an idea—is there yet a hope that we can get a grip on this danger, and choke it?"

Tom's face was still colorless, but there was a gleam in his eye, which Jack had discovered. Perhaps after all it might be only the light of desperation, a determination to die game if a cruel fortune decreed that their time had come. Jack could not tell.

"Yes, I have a plan," said Tom quickly. "Perhaps you'll both call it a wild idea, and think I'm crazy; but desperate cases call for equally desperate remedies, and at the worst we'll have a chance."

"Good boy, Tom!" cried Jack. "Just like you to hit on a plan! Haven't I known you to come to the front many times when things looked very black for us?"

"Tom, tell your scheme!" demanded Beverly. "Things may develop faster than we suspect now, and if there's any way to get around this trouble the sooner we start the better."

"Of course," Tom replied, "we'll be taking the risk of smashing the nose of our craft when we strike, unless luck favors us. I've landed on every sort of ground, from smooth velvety turf to bumpy stuff that almost joggled me to pieces: but I never before tried dropping on an ice-floe!"

Beverly and Jack stared hard at each other. Apparently the idea struck them like a sudden blow, showing that neither had as yet contemplated such a thing.

Then they turned and stared down at the wide field of floating ice that was attached to the towering bulk of the mighty berg, as though weighing the possibility of Tom's amazing suggestion in their minds.

Jack gave a shout.

"Tom, you're a genius, that's what you are!" he almost shrieked in the intensity of his emotion. "I honestly believe it can be done successfully."

"We'd have to drop a whole lot lower, so as to take a closer survey, and learn just how smooth the surface of the floe is," Tom continued.

"I've looked through the glasses," replied Jack. "And as far as I could make out it seemed fairly decent. I know we've landed on worse ground many a time, and without being wrecked."

"Look again then, while I'm dropping down," urged Tom.

All of them were tremendously excited, as may readily be believed. And who would not have been under similar conditions? Although army air pilots are accustomed to taking great risks, and seldom go up without the thought flitting through their minds that their hour may be close at hand, still they are human, and when the dreadful crisis springs upon them they can feel the chilly hand that seems to clutch the heart.

Jack soon made his report.

"Yes, it looks good to me!" he cried, with a hopeful ring to his voice. "I can see a crack or two that would be bad for us to run into; but there's a clear field over on the north side of the floe. I'm sure we could make it without getting badly shaken up. Then it's our only chance; if we miss this what else could we do?"

"Nothing," Tom replied quietly. "But I'm going to circle the berg, and see what lies on the other side."

"Whatever we decide to do," remarked Beverly, who seemed to have recovered to a great extent from his first perturbation, "we must lose no time about carrying it out. That feed pipe might become fully clogged at any minute, you know. Then besides, the sun is ready to dip down behind the sea horizon, when we'll soon be plunged into darkness."

"Yes," agreed Tom, "we mustn't fool away our time. It's going to be no easy job to make a safe landing on the ice, something none of us has ever practiced. But it'd be still worse to go at it haphazard."

The others knew what was in Tom's mind. Should they seriously injure the big bombing plane there would be no way of making repairs. On land it could be turned over to the repair-shop, and inside of a week perhaps emerge once

more in as good shape as ever. No such convenience could be looked for out there in mid-Atlantic!

In a short time they had circled the great mass of ice. They all fully realized now how cold it was, and why the sea water must be affected for a mile or more all around such a tremendous bit of the Arctic regions.

They found that most of the floe lay on the north side of the berg; and decided that their best chance for landing must be in that quarter.

"The old berg looks top-heavy," Jack at one time called out. "You can see that it leans toward the north; and sometimes I've thought it wobbled considerably, though that may have been the plane waving up and down."

"No, you were right, Jack," said Beverly. "Its leaning that way tells that the warmer sea water has begun to eat at its base. Before a great while the berg will roll over, and smash all that floe into bits."

"I hope not when we're on it, working at our motor!" Jack could not keep from exclaiming, looking with more interest than ever at the monster berg that had come all this distance from some glacier a thousand miles away, perhaps several times that distance, and would sooner or later lose itself in sub-tropical waters.

Lower still Tom took them. All eyes con-

tinued to survey the field of ice, particularly in that extreme northern sector where Jack had reported lay the best place for landing.

"Once more in a circle so as to face the wind," said Tom, "and then I mean to put it to the test."

"Good luck to you, Tom!" said Jack. "If ever you dropped as if you were falling on eggs, let it be now. I'm going to hold my breath when we strike the ice, and only hope we don't keep gliding along until we shoot off the edge into the sea!"

"Leave that to me, Jack." came the assurance of the pilot.

After that no one said a word, for both Lieutenant Beverly and Jack Parmly realized that it would be dangerous to distract Tom's attention from his work just at the most critical moment.

The sun had reached the horizon, and inside of a few minutes must vanish from view. At that moment Tom shut off the engine, and made ready to alight!

CHAPTER XX

ON THE ICE FLOE

If ever Tom Raymond had need of skill and care it was then, for what might be an ordinary mishap ashore must be a fatal accident under the conditions by which they were faced.

But almost as lightly as a snowflake touches the ground he brought the wheels under the big bomber in contact with the ice. Indeed, Jack could not tell for a certainty when the actual contact occurred; though immediately afterwards he found himself being shaken more or less as the heavy plane bumped along over the ice.

One peril still menaced them, which was that their momentum, unless halted, might carry them to the terminus of the floe, and plunge them over. But Tom had taken all precautions, and allowed for everything, even an unusual slide on account of the smooth surface under the wheels.

Slower grew their progress, though the bumping continued unabated. And finally they had

come to a full stop, with still some little stretch of the ice field ahead.

Then Jack tried to yell, cowboy fashion; but, to his surprise and disgust, he could hardly make a sound above a whisper, his voice having failed him through sheer nervous excitement.

He jumped from his seat, and immediately sat down with a rude jar on the ice; but, nothing daunted, he quickly scrambled to his feet and began to dance like a wild Indian might when the war tocsin sounds through the village, and all his primeval instincts are aroused by the thought of fighting and plunder.

Tom and Lieutenant Beverly also hastened to leave their seats. They too found that their legs were cramped and almost useless, through having maintained a sitting position during so many weary hours.

Jack's exuberant spirits caused him to fairly hug his chum.

"Didn't I know you could do it, Tom?" he cried. "See how the old luck keeps hanging over us, will you? It's always been this way, Colin; and to have Tom along means success every time."

"That may be," the lieutenant replied, giving Tom a fond look; "but if I were you I'd call it something more than just luck. It takes brains to think up such schemes as this one, brains and a

lively imagination in the bargain; and Tom's rich in both of those requirements."

"Let's get busy, and see about fixing that feed-pipe," broke out the modest object of all this praise. "We have only a short time of daylight to work in, and after that must depend on our little searchlight torch."

All were willing to start work. Jack found himself shivering slightly, although they had not been on the ice-floe many minutes.

"Gee, but it's certainly cold, for a fact!" he exclaimed. "I'd hate to be marooned here any length of time, let me tell you, even if we did have grub enough to last over a week. Why, we'd freeze to death; not to mention what would become of us when the old berg crashed over and scattered all this floe ice!"

"Let's hope that our stay will be of short duration then," said Beverly, with a quick and apprehensive glance in the direction of the towering iceberg, upon the peak of which the last rays of the sinking sun glinted until it seemed to be frosted with a million diamonds.

Tom was already busily engaged, after the bomber had been wheeled partly around, in order that he might have the benefit of what light remained with the departure of day.

Beverly and Jack hovered over him, ready to give advice, or lend a helping hand. Of course

none of them had ever had to do with this particular type of a plane; but then all engines have many similarities in their construction, and Tom, as well as the other two, had proved themselves to be capable mechanicians, as well as able pilots.

Finally, as it was impossible for the three of them to work at the repairs, Jack walked around and examined the singular formation constituting the berg and attendant ice-floe.

"Why," he told himself in glee, "it floated across our path when we needed a landing-place the worst kind, as if we'd ordered it to be held in waiting. It might be the next time there'll be a convenient island handy, though I hope there'll come no next time."

He even found a way to climb on to the berg itself, though in most places the field ice was chopped into small bits by some action on the part of the vast bulk, perhaps during a high wind and a heavy sea.

"All I want to be able to say is that I've been on a regular iceberg," Jack announced, after he had once more returned to his mates; "but it's frigid, let me tell you. Why, there's enough ice in that mountain to freeze all the cream made around New York in a whole season, and then some."

He found that Tom was still busily engaged,

with Beverly bending down in frequent consultation.

"Say, is it going to be anything serious, fellows? Worse than we at first thought?"

Beverly looked up and gave him a reassuring smile. He was now holding the little hand-torch and directing its ray so that Tom could get the full benefit.

"No reason to believe so, Jack," he remarked quietly. "Tom's still of the opinion that we ought to have it all fixed up for keeps before an hour goes by, if things keep on working as we expect."

"Fine! You make me happy when you say that, Colin!" Jack returned. "If only the berg doesn't roll over before we get out of this, I'll consider that we have much to be thankful for," he added slowly.

"Could you feel any motion when you stood on that lower shelf of the berg?" asked Beverly, showing that he had watched what Jack was doing.

"I should say I could," the other assured him. "It nearly made me sea-sick. I'd hate to have to stay here very much longer. If you watch a cloud passing you can see just how the peak dips, and swings back and forth. It's getting ready to tumble, and before long!"

Tom worked on.

He too realized that the longer they were compelled to stay on the ice field the greater their danger must become. If that towering berg ever did turn over bottom-up it would smash the floe into fragments and churn up the adjacent waters in a way that would leave no avenue of escape for the trio of adventurous air pilots who had alighted there by reason of circumstances beyond their control.

His hands felt cold, and he was compelled at times to get up and thrash both arms about to induce circulation in his extremities. Beverly and Jack both offered to take his place, but Tom, having started the job, thought he had better finish it if possible.

"Everything seems to be working along as good as pie," Beverly reported, in order to add to Jack's peace of mind, for he knew the other must be growing a bit anxious again. Delay meant so much to Jack in this endeavor to beat the steamship across the Atlantic.

"If you've no objections, I'll rustle after that grub bag, and indulge in something to help get rid of this empty feeling I've got. We'll all feel better for something to eat," said Jack. "I think Tom could work faster if he would take time now for a sandwich."

"You're right, perhaps, Jack," returned Colin.

"Although we had better wait for a full meal till we get in the air."

"Here's luck, boys!" cried Jack a minute afterwards.

"What have you found now?" asked Tom, without looking up.

"Why, the coffee's still hot. And let me tell you, it feels good to my hands. There never was a finer thing for poor air pilots than these bottles that allow them to have a warm drink when two miles up, and in freezing temperature. This will put fresh life in our bodies."

"That isn't half bad," answered Tom; "so hand it over, and I'll take a drink or two."

Tom swallowed his coffee and hastily ate a sandwich, but the others, without Tom's reason for haste, ate hungrily.

Never, they confessed, had they felt such voracious appetites as on this flight. Perhaps the invigorating sea air had something to do with it; but Jack, at least, was not the one to bother himself about the cause, so long as the provisions held out.

Some time passed in this way. Tom at work, Beverly holding the flashlight in one hand and taking in the other such food as Jack handed to him.

Tom had just remarked he believed he had

effected a radical cure, and that the feed-pipe was not likely to become obstructed again; at the same time Jack could see he was starting to put things together once more.

It began to look as though they might be ready to make a fresh start in a very short time, not more than ten minutes, Jack figured. It thrilled him to realize this fact. He even glanced toward the towering berg as if to say:

"Now be good, and just hold off your gymnastics till we get started, old chap! Afterwards you can cut up as much as you please, and little we'll care. But I've got too much at stake right now in getting to land to have any silly ice mountain turn over on me. So forget your troubles for another half hour, if you please!"

Just then Jack saw something move close by. A scuffling sound, followed by a strange sniffling, could be plainly heard. Jack bent down and clutched Beverly by the arm, saying shrilly:

"Listen, both of you! That Polar bear is coming for us, and I think he means business, too!"

CHAPTER XXI

ATTACKED BY A POLAR BEAR

"HERE'S trouble, all right!" grumbled Beverly, as he turned, looking to where Jack was pointing, and also discovered something moving.

Tom dropped his monkey-wrench. Something else besides a tool of that kind would be needed to defend them against the claws and teeth of such a bulky monster as a huge Polar bear.

All of them could now make the animal out as Beverly concentrated the little ray of light upon him. The beast was advancing slowly, but pugnaciously, sniffing the air, and evidently furiously hungry on account of his prolonged cruise upon the icefield, deprived of his customary fish meals.

"What ought we do, Tom?" Jack called out hurriedly. "If we retreat, like as not he'll muss things up around here, and maybe ruin our plane for us."

"We must keep him away!" announced Lieutenant Beverly. "It would mean death to us all

if he got to tumbling around and smashed some of the parts of the machine."

As he said this he fumbled about his person, producing the automatic pistol with which he usually went on his flights; and without which few air pilots venture to enter into combat with enemy fliers.

Tom duplicated his act immediately, while Jack, at the same time, secured his weapon from the place where he kept it when in his seat. So, after all, things did not seem to be altogether favorable to Bruin; and had the bear only known what he was up against possibly he would have found it discreet to back off and let the three strange creatures alone.

"Be sure to hold your fire, boys!" Lieutenant Beverly ordered, taking command. "We must be like old Put at the battle of Bunker Hill, and wait till we can see his eyes clearly. It's going to be hard to drive off that big rascal with only pistols! Aim for the spot back of his foreleg if you can; that may reach his heart!"

There was not much time for preparation, since the bear kept advancing at the same shuffling gait. Tom tried shouting at him, hoping the sound of a human voice might cause the beast to alter his intention, and turn back.

The bear did stop, and thrust his muzzle further out as though to get a better whiff of

the queer animals against which he found himself pitted.

"Didn't go, Tom, for he's coming on again!" cried Jack.

"Get ready to give him a volley," the lieutenant ordered. "Tom, move off a bit to the right, and I'll go to the left. That may upset his calculations some; and besides, we'll have a better chance to bore in back of his forelegs. Jack, stand where you are, and shoot when we do!"

"I'm game!" came the steady reply.

Both the others made a quick move, and the bear found himself facing three separate points of peril. He growled fiercely, and came on again, straight toward the plane, which seemed to have aroused his curiosity. Perhaps he fancied it was some monster bird that would afford him more than one good meal.

"Give it to him, everybody!" suddenly shouted Lieutenant Beverly.

Hardly had he uttered the last word than there was a rattle of firearms as the three of them discharged their weapons. There arose a mighty roar of anger as the bear felt the sudden pain of bullets entering his flesh.

"Again! He's staggering, but full of fight yet!"

Once more the pistol shots rang out. The bear was moving, but seemed to be growing quite

weak and confused, for once he fell half over, though managing to recover and push on.

It took several more rounds before the huge bulk rolled over, gave a few spasmodic kicks, and then expired.

"Bully work, boys!" shouted Jack, as he hurried forward to take a close-up view of their victim. "Gee whiz! but isn't he a buster though? Never did I dream I'd help bring down a real Arctic white bear! And just to think of the queer conditions of this hunt, too, will you? I wager, now, there never was one like it—by airplane at that!"

After one look at the bear Tom returned to his task. Shooting game was all very fine, but he had business of a different character to call for his attention just then.

"Wonder if the old chap has got a mate around?" suggested Jack, a sudden thought causing him to survey the ice-floe as seen under the faint light of the stars that were beginning to show in the heavens above.

"Not one chance in a thousand he had company," Beverly insisted; "but no harm in your keeping a wary eye about, Jack, while Tom gets things in shape again. I have to stay here with the light. If you've a sharp knife what's to hinder you from taking one of his claws for a trophy?"

"I'll do that same. Thank you for reminding me, Colin! Some fellows I know are such Doubting Thomases you have to be in a position to prove everything you tell them. Tom, loan me that knife of yours, please. It's got an edge like a razor to it, and those paws look simply immense."

"Make haste about it, for we'll soon be ready to skip out of this place," Tom warned him as he handed over the knife.

Jack began to work industriously. He found he had undertaken no mean job when he contracted to sever one of the front paws of the dead Polar bear. Not only did he have to cut through ligaments and tough skin, but the bones themselves gave him no end of trouble.

He solved this by finding the heavy monkey-wrench, and using it as a hammar, with the knife in place, thus actually severing the paw complete after considerable trouble.

"There, isn't that a regular beauty to show?" he demanded, holding up the result of his labor. "I feel something like a young Indian warrior who's just killed his first grizzly, and means to hang the claws about his neck to prove his bravery."

He stood looking down at the monster bear for a minute, debating something in his mind.

"I wonder now," Jack finally observed, "if we

could eat that bear meat, supposing something happened to keep us marooned on this ice for weeks at a stretch? What do you think about it, Tom?"

"It might be possible, if we got in a bad pinch and were almost starving," came the reply. "But you must remember we'd have to swallow it raw, because we haven't any means for making a fire; and trying to kindle a blaze on the ice would be a tough job."

"Then I'm glad to know we don't have to depend on bear meat to keep us from starving," Jack announced. "Pretty nearly through," Tom?"

"Five minutes more ought to see us ready to start. I'm pretty hungry though and would like something more to eat. You boys ate a good deal, but you called it 'a snack,' and not 'supper.'

"On the whole," Colin suggested, "perhaps we'd better leave the supper until we get to moving smoothly again. Things ought to taste better if we feel we've got the bulge on this engine trouble for fair."

Jack did not try to urge any undue haste. Nevertheless he looked several times in the quarter close by where the big berg raised its cone, as if his uneasiness now might be wholly concerned with its possibilities for making fresh trouble.

Was it imagination, or some sort of optical delusion that made the tip of the huge berg seem to come lower and lower, then draw back again as if making a ceremonious bow like a dancing-master?

Jack gasped, and opened his lips to cry out, but thinking better of it restrained the temptation. They could not get away until the repairs were complete. At the same time, while trying to make himself believe he had magnified the thing, he was conscious of a louder grinding noise than any heard up to that moment.

Tom was putting the finishing bolt in place. A few more efforts and he would be able to announce that his task had been completed. Jack became conscious of a peculiar undulating movement to the ice under his feet. It was just the same as he could remember experiencing when on skates, and going at full steam over a thin section of ice that must have easily broken under his weight only for the speed with which he crossed over.

Was the ice floe about to break up? Would it result in several smaller sections separating from the main stem, none of which might be of a size to allow them sufficient room for making a start?

The thought alarmed Jack. He also knew that undoubtedly any movement to the pack ice must be caused by some action of the giant berg.

Was that mountain of ice about to take the plunge at last, and turn over, its base being eaten away to such an extent that the whole had become top-heavy?

Once again did Jack turn his startled eyes to the left. He could not get it out of his mind how terribly suggestive that "bow" on the part of the berg had been.

There it was, coming again! Perhaps the wind had grown stronger since they dropped down upon the ice, and was adding its force to the action of the waters.

Jack found himself unable to hold in any longer. If such a dreadful peril hung over them it was time his companions knew the need of haste in getting free from that doomed field of ice. So he put all doubts behind him and gave tongue.

"Hurry, hurry, Tom! The iceberg is acting queerly. It's tottering as if ready to roll over on us! Don't you see how it acts, Tom?"

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN THE ICEBERG ROLLED OVER

FORTUNATELY Tom had everything ready for an immediate start, acting under orders, Jack and Beverly having previously changed the position of the big plane, so that it now faced the run taken when landing.

This brought the wind back of them; but that would be an asset rather than a detriment. They had also gone hastily over the course to make absolutely certain there was no break, or other trap, which might give them serious trouble.

"Jump aboard, both of you!" cried Tom, still keeping his head—a lucky thing, since to get "rattled" in such a crisis might prove fatal.

The beating of the engine and the whirr of the propellers announced that they were off. On the comparatively smooth ice it was easy to make a start unassisted by mechanicians or hostlers.

Jack's heart seemed to be in his throat, and he waited in feverish suspense to learn whether success or failure was to be their fortune. Faster

now grew their progress, but would the stretch of ice prove a long enough area to give them the necessary momentum?

Every second they expected to hear horrible grinding noises from behind, such as must accompany the toppling over of the berg. Even the splash of waves against the further side of the big ice-floe seemed like the pounding of a monster hammer, at least to Jack's excited imagination.

They were now drawing perilously near the brink. Was Tom ever going to elevate the plane and attempt the rise from the flat surface of the ice?

Just when it seemed to Jack that hope must yield to despair he realized that the jumpy motion of the plane ceased suddenly. He knew what this meant, and that Tom had finally shown his hand, for they no longer bumped along but began to move through space!

Then Jack fell back, breathing freely again. Success had rewarded their efforts, and once more the big bomber was speeding through its own element on the wings of the wind.

But it had indeed been a narrow escape for the adventurous trio; for hardly had they started to swing upward into space when from behind them arose a series of horrible crashings, gurglings, and the mad splashing of water, telling that in

truth the giant berg had carried out its threat and rolled completely over, playing havoc with the entire floe.

No one spoke immediately. In fact, none of them could have uttered a word, no matter how hard he had tried. In each young heart a feeling of intense gratitude reigned, as well as a sensation of horror, for only too well did they know what their immediate fate must have been had they remained prisoners on the ice but another two minutes.

Tom pointed the nose of the plane directly into the southwest. He even seemed to be getting additional speed out of his motors, as though bent on making up for the lost time.

All of them began to settle down for another long monotonous period with the whole night before them. Far from comfortable might be their situation, but not a single complaint would be heard. All they asked was that things might go on as they were, with the plane reeling off knot after knot of the cruise into the west.

After a while Jack remembered that Tom had had but a bite of supper. Accordingly he got out the supplies and proceeded to serve them. Then he took Tom's place for a while and held the airship true to her course.

They kept about five hundred feet or so above the sea. Somehow it gave them a little encour-

agement just to catch the glint of the stars on the tumbling waves below. There was a friendliness in the billows, a something that seemed to keep them in contact with their fellow men; a thing which they missed when passing along two thousand feet or more above the surface of the terrestial globe, even beyond the floating clouds.

So the long vigil was taken up. Hour after hour the giant bomber must wing its swift flight, ever speeding onward into the realm of space through which it was now making a voyage unequalled since Columbus sailed his three high-decked boats into that unknown ocean at the end of which he expected to come to the East Indies.

By turns they managed to get some sleep, each serving his trick as pilot.

The hours grew into early morning. How eagerly did the pilot often turn his tired head to gaze backward toward the east, to see if but the first faint gleam of coming dawn had appeared there. And how joyfully did he welcome it when that desire became reality.

So the unfolding day found them, still heading onward, and with everything promising well. Jack, of course, had his binoculars out as soon as it was possible to see any distance. Shortly afterwards he made an important announcement.

"Smoke head of us, fellows. Much too much

to come from any one steamer. You can see it with the naked eye, dead on there!"

After taking a good look Tom, who was at the wheel, gave his opinion.

"It might be a vessel afire," he said slowly. "One of those tank-oil steamers would make a fierce smoke, you know. But on the whole I rather believe it's a convoy of troop ships going across to France."

"I never thought of that, Tom!" cried Jack, again clapping the glasses to his eyes; "but I reckon you're right, for I can see funnels of black smoke rising from different quarters. Yes, there must be dozens of boats in that flotilla. What had we better do?"

"Go aloft, and try to keep out of sight among the little clouds," was the immediate reply Tom made. "We could continue to watch, and see all that passed below, at the same time keeping ourselves fairly invisible. They'll hardly be looking up so as to discover a speck floating past. And then again all that smoke is bound to make it difficult for them to see."

He lost no time in commencing a spiral climb for altitude, boring upward with the powerful bomber in a way that was wonderful.

By degrees they attained the height desired, and once again did Tom head into the southwest.

Jack reported what he saw from time to time, calling above the noise made by engines and propellers.

"It's a big convoy, all right," he told them. "I can see ever so many steamships following one another in double column. Each is loaded with our boys in khaki, I presume. Then off on either side and ahead are little specks that I can just make out by reason of their smoke streamers. Those must be the score or more of destroyers, guarding the flotilla against U-boat attack. It's a great sight, let me tell you! Here, Colin's getting out his glasses to take a look. Tom, you must have a chance too."

Each in turn managed to survey the stirring spectacle as spread out upon the sea far beneath them. And the pulses of those gallant lads throbbed with pardonable pride when they realized what magnificent efforts America was making to win the war in favor of the Allies, after entering it so late herself.

Gradually the great smoke cloud began to grow more distant, the fleet with its convoy having passed by, continuing to head into the east, where the lurking U-boat would possibly be waiting to attack.

"That was a great sight!" exclaimed Tom, as their attention again turned to possibilities lying before them, rather than what had passed by.

"Never forget it as long as I live!" Jack declared vehemently.

"It's been a good thing for us in more than one way," Tom went on to say. "You see, personally, I've been just a bit in doubt about our actual bearings; and this has set me straight. I can put my finger on the actual spot on the chart where we'd be likely to meet the fleet. So now we've got to change our course sharply."

"Running more into the south-southwest, you mean, I suppose, Tom?" asked Beverly.

"Just that," continued the acting pilot. "We want to strike the Virginia shore, you understand, and right now we're off Long Island. After several hours on our new course we'll again make a sharp swing into the west, and then look for land!"

"And that land, oh, joy! will be our own America!" cried Jack, his face fairly beaming with expectation.

They kept booming along on the new course for several hours, and as it did not seem necessary to continue at such a great altitude they again descended to the old familiar line of flight, with the sea about five hundred feet below.

"Given another hour," Tom said, along about the middle of the morning, "and it will be time to strike for the west. We must be off Delaware or the tip of Maryland right now. Jack just re-

ported a faint glimpse of land, but wasn't sure it might not be a low-hanging cloud bank."

"And now we're in for another experience, I'm afraid," called out Jack, "for there's a nasty sea fog sweeping along from the south. We're bound to drive into it before five minutes more—the first real mist blanket to strike us all the way across."

Jack's prediction proved no idle one, for in less than the time specified they found themselves suddenly enveloped by a dense mantle of mist through which it would have been utterly impossible to have seen anything a hundred feet away.

Tom for one did not like the coming of that fog just when they were about to drew near the land of their hopes. Unlike a vessel, they could not come to anchor and ride it out, waiting for the fog to lift; but must drive on, and desperately strive to find some sort of landing.

"The thickest fog I ever saw!" Jack observed, after they had been passing through the moist gray blanket of mist for some little time.

"Just the usual kind you'll meet with on the sea at times," answered the lieutenant. "I was caught in one when out on the fishing banks, and it wasn't any too pleasant a feeling it gave me either. But for our compass we'd never have reached shore again."

"And but for the compass right now," said Tom, "it would be next to impossible to steer a straight course."

"One good thing," Jack told them; "very little danger of a collision, such as vessels are likely to encounter in so dense a fog."

"No, the air passage across the Atlantic hasn't become so popular yet that we have to keep blowing a fog horn while sailing," laughed Colin.

All of them were feeling considerably brighter, now that their wonderful venture seemed to be drawing close to a successful termination. If only their luck held good and allowed them to make a safe landing, they felt they would have good reason for gratitude.

"What makes it feel so queer at times?" Jack asked later on. "Why, I seem to have the blood going to my head, just as happened when looping the loop, and hanging too long in stays."

"I've noticed the same thing myself," added Colin briskly, "and tried to figure out the cause. Tom, what do you say about it?"

"A queer situation has arisen, according to my calculation," the pilot told them. "Fact is, without being able to see a solitary thing anywhere about us, above or below, it's often impossible to know when we're sailing on a level keel, or flying upside down!"

"That's a fact," admitted Lieutenant Beverly.

"When you haven't the slightest thing to guide you, stars, sun, or earth, how can you tell which is up or which is down? We go forward because of the compass; but part of the time I do believe, just as you say, Tom, we've been flying upside-down!"

"I don't fancy this way of flying," Tom announced. "I think it would be better for us to climb in order to see if we can get out of this pea-soup."

"Ditto here!" echoed Jack. "I'm getting dizzy with it all, and my head feels twice as heavy as ordinary. You can't mount any too soon to please me, Tom."

Lieutenant Beverly was not averse, it seemed, so the call became unanimous.

"All we want is to sight land," the Lieutenant remarked. "Then we can start for the interior, and try to pick a nice soft spot for landing without getting all smashed up."

Later on he was reminded of that wish by Jack, for they certainly found such a spot, as future events proved.

By climbing to a considerable height it was found that they could avoid the uncomfortable experiences that had befallen them closer to the surface of the ocean. Here the sun was shining, and while clouds floated around them there was no longer a chance of the plane being inverted.

Jack could make out land at times, though still faintly seen, and lying low on the uncertain horizon.

"I wonder if that can be Virginia I see?" he sometimes said; but talking more to himself than trying to make the others hear.

"It isn't far away at most, Jack," Beverly assured him; for he sympathized with Jack and the reason the other had for longing to get to the home town ahead of his scheming cousin.

"Show me the chart and just about where we ought to be right now, Tom," said Jack. "That is, if it's no trouble."

"No trouble to do it," came the quick reply, and with a pencil Tom made a cross on the chart while Jack's eyes danced with joy.

"Then that must be Virginia off there to the west!" he cried, again snatching up the glasses for another earnest look.

Tom watched him out of the corner of his eye. Well did he know that as Jack feasted his gaze upon the far distant land in imagination he was seeing that dearly loved home, with the friends who were so precious to him, and in fancy receiving their warm greetings.

They continued on for some little time. Tom felt pretty confident that he was correct, though he would be glad to have some confirmation of his figuring.

"The fog is thinning some!" he finally stated, "and I think we'd better seek a lower level."

"Might as well," added Beverly, approving of the idea instantly.

"Yes," added Jack, "when the time comes to fly landward we'll want to be down far enough to see where we're going. We needn't be afraid any longer of making a sensation, because seaplanes must be cruising over these waters nearly every day, coming from the station near Fortress Monroe at Hampton Roads."

Accordingly it was not long before they were skirting the upper reaches of the diminishing fog bank, being about a thousand feet or so above the sea itself. Now and then slight rifts appeared in the disappearing mist, and at such intervals it was possible for them to catch fleeting glimpses of the Atlantic, whose wide expanse they had successfully spanned, an event that would make history, if only it could ever be publicly known.

Jack could no longer see the low shore, much to his distress; but then he knew positively it was there, and when the time came to change their course directly into the west a brief flight would carry them over the land.

It really mattered little to him where they made their landing, since he would be able to

find a way of reaching Bridgeton within a few hours. He consulted his little wrist watch again and again.

Tom was more than a little amused to see Jack even clap it close to his ear. He knew the reason of his doing this, for time was crawling on so slowly in the estimation of the impatient one that he even suspected the faithful little watch had ceased to go, though its steady ticking must have speedily assured him such could not possibly be the case.

"Listen!" Lieutenant Beverly suddenly called out.

A strange weird sound came faintly to their ears. Even above all the noise of their working engine they could make it out. To any one who came from the interior of the country it might have seemed a bewildering sound, and have called up strange fancies connected with marine monsters that were said to have once inhabited these waters near the Gulf Stream.

But the trio of voyagers had lived too long near the coast not to recognize a fog-siren when they heard its strident call.

Jack in particular was exultant.

"Tell me, is that the anchored light-ship's siren, Tom, do you think?" he demanded, with considerable excitement.

The pilot nodded his head, and with a finger pointed to a dot on the chart to indicate that it could be nothing else.

"I presume, Tom," Jack went on to say, "you came down when you did partly to catch that sound as we came near the shoals where the lightship stands guard day and night the whole year through."

"Well, I had that in mind," came the answer, "for, as I said before, while feeling pretty sure of my bearings I thought I'd like to have them verified. And now you can see I wasn't much out of the way."

"You've done splendidly, Tom," said Beverly, clapping the other heartily on the back. "We've all carried ourselves like true Americans through this whole affair; and it'll afford us considerable satisfaction when we look back on the wonderful trip."

"And now, Tom, hadn't we better turn toward the shore?" asked Jack.

"Just as soon as we get over the lightship I will know how to steer, Jack. Keep cool, and before long you'll be looking down on our beloved Virginia once again."

"You make me mighty happy when you say that, Tom. Many times I've wondered if I'd ever see it again, we've been overseas so long and in so many perils while doing our duty. How

fine it'll be to stand once more on the soil where both of us were born, and know we've done a pretty big thing in crossing the Atlantic by the new air route!"

They fell silent again after that, but not for long. Louder and clearer came the frequent long-drawn wails of the steam fog-horn, until finally it seemed evident they were almost exactly above the lightship that, as Tom knew, was anchored on the shoals to warn mariners of their danger by means of a far-reaching lamp and the powerful siren's hoarse voice.

"Now we'll strike in for the land!" called out Tom, his announcement causing Jack to thrill with delight, while Beverly too showed his pleasure in broad smiles.

Soon afterwards they were speeding due west, with Jack gluing his eyes to his glasses and reporting every few minutes fresh signs of vast importance. Virginia soon lay beneath them, to announce that they had completed their wonderful flight across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END OF THE FLIGHT

No LONGER did the fog enfold them in its damp grasp. After leaving the immediate coast behind them the last trace of it disappeared.

Jack refused to take his entranced eyes from the binoculars for a single minute. He felt a hundred-fold repaid for all the perils encountered during the memorable flight from the shore of France, during which they had spanned the vast area of the Atlantic, and were now sailing peacefully along above the home soil.

Lieutenant Beverly made an announcement just then that startled them.

"We must look for a place to drop down without any further loss of time!" he called out to Tom, who was still serving as pilot.

"But it would be mighty fine," Jack observed wistfully, "if only we might keep going on until we got a few miles out of Bridgeton. I know every rod of territory for miles around and could point out a dandy level field to make our landing

in. We'd be able to descend without observation, too, I really believe."

"That'd surely be nice, Jack," Beverly told him, "and I wish we could accommodate you. But the fact is we're about out of gas! I noted this a short time ago, but said nothing, because it would do no good to throw a scare into you both. Besides, Tom had already headed direct for the land at the time."

"How lucky that didn't happen when we were a hundred miles out at sea!" Tom exclaimed, his first thought being one of satisfaction, rather than useless complaint. This was characteristic of Tom, always seeing the bright side of things, no matter how gloomy they appeared to others.

"Then I'd better be looking for a landing-place," Jack quickly remarked, getting over his little disappointment.

"And the sooner we duck the better," Beverly admitted. "If the motors go back on us we'll be in a bad fix; and volplaning to the ground isn't always as easy as it's pictured, especially when you've no choice of a landing."

"After all, it does not matter so very much," Jack concluded. "Surely once we succeed in gaining a footing we can discover a means for getting to our goal without much loss of time."

He bent his energies toward looking for what

would seem to be a promising open spot, where there would not be apt to be any pitfalls or traps waiting to wreck their plane, and possibly endanger their lives.

"Scrub woods all below us, Tom!" he announced.

"But there must be openings here and there," the pilot told him. "If only the field seems long enough to admit of our coming to a stop, we'd better take chances."

"Nothing yet, sorry to say," called out Jack.

"Suppose you drop lower, Tom," suggested Beverly. "If we skirt the tops of the taller trees we'll be better able to see without depending on the glasses. All three of us can be on the lookout at the same time."

Tom considered that a good idea and he lost no time in carrying it out. It was easier now to take particular note of the ground; but they passed over mile after mile of the scrub without discovering what they most earnestly sought.

"Things are getting down to a fine point, Tom," warned Beverly. "Our gas is on its last legs, and any minute now we'll find ourselves without motive power."

"It must change soon," the pilot told them. "This scrub forest has got to give way to rising ground and open spaces."

"But if it doesn't, what then?" asked Jack.

"I hate to think of crashing down into those trees," Tom admitted. "We've just got to get over being too particular. Several places we let pass us might have answered our purpose. Look ahead, Jack, and tell me if there doesn't seem to be some sort of open spot lying there."

Jack gave a whoop.

"Here we are!" he cried exultantly. "It's an opening in the scrub timber, a big gash too, for a fact! Why, already I can see that it looks like a level green field. How queer it should be lying right there, as if it might be meant for us."

"You don't glimpse any other chance further on, do you, Jack?" continued the pilot.

"Never a thing, Tom. Just a continuation of those same old dwarf oak trees. But why do you ask that? What's the matter with this fine big gap?"

"I'm afraid it's a marsh, and not a dry field!" Tom answered. "But all the same I presume we'll have to chance it. Better to strike a bog than to fall into those trees, where the lot of us might be killed."

"Suppose we circle around, and try to find the best place for a descent," proposed Beverly.

All of them strained their eyes to try to see better. Unfortunately a cloud passed over the sun just then, rendering it difficult to make sure of anything.

"What's the verdict?" sang out Tom presently, keeping a wary eye on the straining motors.

"Looks to me as if that further part might be the highest ground," was Jack's decision.

"I agree with you there!" instantly echoed Beverly.

"That settles it! Here goes to make the try," Tom announced, again swinging in and shutting off all power.

He continued to glide downward, approaching the ground at a certain point which he had picked out with his highly trained eye as apparently the best location for the landing.

Suspecting what might happen, Tom held back until the very last, so that the big bombing plane was not going at much speed when its wheels came in contact with the ground for the first time.

Something happened speedily, for it proved to be a bog, and as the rubber-tired wheels sank in and could not be propelled, the natural result followed that the nose of the giant plane was buried in the soft ground, and they came to an abrupt stop.

Tom was the first to crawl forth, and Beverly followed close upon his heels. The third member of the party did not seem as ready to report, which fact alarmed his chum.

"Jack, what's wrong with you?" he called out,

starting to climb aboard the smashed plane again.

"Nothing so very much, I think; but I seem to be all twisted up in this broken gear, and can hardly move," came the answer.

Tom secretly hoped it was not a broken arm or leg instead. He started to feel around, and soon managed to get the other free from the broken ends of the wire stays that had somehow hindered his escape. Together they crawled out, to find Lieutenant Beverly feeling himself all over as if trying to discover what the extent of his damages were.

"Try to see if you've been injured any way seriously, Jack," begged his anxious chum, still unconvinced.

An investigation disclosed the marvelous fact that all of them had managed to come through the smashing landing with but a small amount of damage. When this was ascertained without any doubt Jack started to prance around, unable to contain himself within bounds.

"Excuse me if I act a little looney, fellows!" he begged. "Fact is, I'm just keyed up to top-notch and something will give way unless I let off steam a bit."

With that he yelled and laughed and cheered until his breath gave out. Neither of the others felt any inclination to try to stop his antics. Truth to tell, they were tempted to egg Jack on,

because he was really expressing in his own fashion something of the same exultation that all of them felt.

The great flight had been carried through, and here they were landed on the soil of America, three young aviators who but a few days before had been serving their country on the fighting-front in Northern France. Yes, the Atlantic had been successfully bridged by a heavier-than-air plane, and from the time of leaving France until this minute their feet had not once pressed any soil; for that ice-pack in mid-Atlantic could not be counted against them, since it too was nothing but congealed water.

"But the poor old bomber! It's ruined, Colin, I'm afraid," Jack finally managed to say, when he sank down from his exertions.

"That's a small matter," Beverly assured him. "The main thing is that we did what we set out to do, and proved that the dream of all real airmen could be made to come true. We may live to see a procession of monster boats of the air setting out for over-seas daily, carrying passengers, as well as mail and express matter."

"Yes," said Tom gravely, and yet with a pardonable trace of pride in voice and manner, "the Atlantic has been conquered, and saddled, and bridled, like any wild broncho of the plains. But

hadn't we better be thinking of getting out of this soft marshy tract?"

"As quickly as we possibly can," Jack told him. "We'll try to run across some Virginia farmer, black or white, who will have a horse and agree to take us to the nearest railroad station. Once we hit civilization, the rest will be easy."

"What about the plane, Colin?" asked Tom.

"It can stay here for the time being," the other answered him. "Later on I'll hire some one to have it hauled out and stored against my coming back—after we've been a while in Berlin and got Heine to behaving himself."

They secured such things as it was desirable they should keep. Acting on Tom's advice everything that might testify to their identity was also removed, lest the bogged plane be accidentally discovered and betray them. Afterwards they set out to find a way beyond the borders of the marsh and scrub oaks, to some place where possibly they might get assistance.

CHAPTER XXIV

SURPRISING BRIDGETON

"HERE'S the end of the marshy tract." Tom said, after they had been floundering around for some little time.

"How fine it feels to be on solid ground again," Jack observed, stamping his feet as though he really enjoyed the sensation.

Indeed, after being for such a long time, weary hours after hours, confined in the big bombing plane, the relief was greatly appreciated by both Tom Raymond and Lieutenant Beverly, as well as by Jack Parmly.

"Now for the home town!" the last mentioned told his companions. "And as near as I can figure it out there's not a ghost of a chance that Cousin Randolph could have arrived before me."

"For that matter I'm sure the French steamer must be still far out at sea, with a day or two's journey ahead of her," Colin assured him.

"Then it's my game, provided we don't run across some U. S. army authorities who'd want

to know our names and hold us for investigation, which would knock everything flat."

"We're going to try to avoid all that bother," Beverly assured him. "It isn't going to make us feel very proud of our achievement, since we have to hide our light under a bushel; but for one I don't regret it. No matter if we have to be punished for desertion, our motive was honorable; and they never will be able to deny us the credit of having made the longest flight on record in a heavier-than-air machine."

"All the same," urged Tom, "I'd rather keep quiet about that stunt, for the present at least. I want to go back and finish the work over there. If the Huns are going to be driven to the Rhine we ought to be doing our duty by Uncle Sam; which we couldn't if shut up in the Government penitentiary at Fort Leavenworth, awaiting trial as deserters."

"Here's a plain trail that may lead us out of this region of scrub oaks, and to some farmer's place!" the lieutenant exclaimed just then; and in their eagerness to get in touch with some one who would take them to the railroad they talked no further concerning the great flight and its possible serious consequences to them.

Half an hour afterwards they came to the home of a farmer, who was trying to make a living out of his isolated holdings, eking it out, as he informed them while his wife was getting

up the best meal possible, by doing some terrapin hunting, and even trapping muskrats and such fur-bearing animals during the otherwise unprofitable winter months.

It was very comfortable to sit down once more to a table after being so long taking "snacks" at odd hours, and being cramped in the bombing plane. And as the farmer's wife had plenty of fresh eggs, which they told her not to stint, the generous omelet she produced was fully appreciated, flanked as it was by rashers of pretty fair bacon.

There were also some freshly made soda biscuits which had a true old-fashioned Southern taste, appreciated by Tom and Jack. Lieutenant Beverly did not show any great liking for them; but he was a Northerner, brought up on baking-powder biscuits, so the others could understand his want of appreciation.

Taken all in all, they certainly enjoyed that first bite ashore after the completion of their memorable flight across the Atlantic.

Jack, so Tom said, seemed to think it was a sort of celebration because of the event, for his face was wreathed in a perpetual smile.

"The sort of smile," Jack retorted, "that won't come off."

"Oh, how good I do feel!" was a remark that if he made it once he did a dozen times, always

finding it greeted by answering nods on the part of his two companions.

Of course they told the farmer they were aviators who had had the misfortune to drop into the marsh, where he would find their plane.

Beverly hired him to dismantle this in part, and store it away in his shed until later on it could be called for in person. He was not to deliver it to any person without the presence of one of the trio.

When he started out to drive them in his old rickety vehicle to the nearest railroad station, miles distant, he was almost stricken dumb because Beverly, in the fulness of his gratitude over their marvelous escape, thrust a full hundred dollars upon him, with a promise of a like amount later on for looking after the abandoned bombing plane.

"To-day is marked with a white stone in the life of Farmer Jenkins, believe me," Jack whispered aside to Tom, as they saw the amazed look spreading over the man's weather-beaten face.

"It's that with all of us," said Tom soberly.

Jack fell silent after that. He was engrossed with thoughts connected with his unexpected return to the home of his childhood; and in imagination could see the excitement their unheralded appearance was certain to arouse.

It had been arranged between them that their presence must be kept as much a secret as possible. On this account they would delay their arrival at the home of Jack's mother until after darkness had set in.

"To-morrow," Jack had said, when these things were being discussed, "we'll telegraph to Mr. Smedley in Richmond to come on without delay in connection with my dead uncle's estate, ready to settle it according to the provisions of his queer will. Then we'll be ready for Randolph when he bobs up."

Beverly had also made a suggestion when they were thus talking it all over, and arranging plans after their usual way.

"Now I've got a good friend who lives on Staten Island, right in New York harbor," he informed them. "Often while at his house visiting I've amused myself with a glass watching steamers pass through the Narrows lying between the shore of the island and that part of Brooklyn opposite Fort Wadsworth. I'll wire him to let me know by the same means when *La Bretagne* reaches Quarantine in the harbor."

"A clever idea, Colin!" Tom cried. "In that way we can figure out just when Jack's cousin might expect to arrive in Bridgeton to claim the estate as being the first one on the ground, thanks to that silly provision of the old man's will."

"Given two hours to get off the vessel, after the time she reaches Quarantine," Jack figured, "and six more to get to Richmond makes eight in all. Then he might be two hours getting out to Bridgeton, for trains are not very plentiful. He could make it in that time if he took a roadster with a chauffeur and came that way. Ten hours in all."

"We'll be lying in wait for Randolph, all right!" laughed Beverly. "And what a surprise it'll be! The man must think he's dreaming, having left you over in France, Jack, on the fighting front when he sailed, with not one chance in a thousand that you could catch even the next boat, days later, and then finding you here ahead of him!"

The prospect pleased them all so much that they made light of the merciless jostling received in that springless wagon over wretched Virginia shore roads. In fact, they were so elated over the great success that had rewarded their daring venture that it seemed just then as if nothing could ever again make them feel blue, or depressed in spirits.

In due time the lonely little station was reached. It was then two in the afternoon of that eventful day. Just as Tom anticipated, it turned out that there would not be a train in the direction they wished to go for two hours

and more. This train would drop them at another station where a connection was made with the road that ran through Bridgeton.

It was lucky they found themselves in no hurry, thanks, as Jack naively remarked, to their having come across "on the air-line limited."

The time dragged to Jack, naturally, but he felt he had no reason for complaint after such wonderful good fortune. At last their train came along. What if it was ten minutes late? That would only shorten their wait at the junction.

"So long as we reach the old town by nine tonight I'll be satisfied," Jack had bravely committed himself by saying; and indeed it was just about then they did jump from the steps of the car at Bridgeton, for the second train had been two hours late.

Nevertheless all of them were united in thinking they had made a swift trip from the American sector of the fighting front in France to the town of Bridgeton in the Old Dominion in just *four complete days.*

Jack led the way, though, of course, Tom would have been just as competent a guide, since this was also his home town.

How those blinking lights in the well-remembered windows of the Parmly home held Jack's eyes, once he sighted them! Never before in all

his life had he felt such a delicious thrill creep over him from head to toe.

Knocking on the door he and his chums carried out their pre-arranged plan. Jack and Tom were to keep back out of sight, leaving Lieutenant Beverly to break the glorious news first and prepare the family, so there might not be so loud an outcry as to arouse the neighbors and breed the excitement in the community that neither of the returned fighters wished.

Jack's aunt, who, a widow herself, made her home with her widowed sister-in-law, came to the door, for some reason or other. Perhaps the negro servants still went home at night, as had been the case before Jack went to the war. She looked surprised and anxious as soon as she saw that the caller was a stranger, and evidently an aviator from his dress.

"This is Mrs. Parmly, I believe?" the visitor hastened to say.

"Mrs. Job Parmly. Mrs. Parmly's sister-in-law."

"I see. Mrs. Parmly, my name is Beverly, Lieutenant Beverly of the United States Aerial Corps, just over from France. I am a good friend of your nephew, Jack, who has entrusted a message to me to deliver to his mother. May I come in for a short time, Mrs. Parmly?"

He was immediately warmly greeted and drawn into the sitting-room where he met Jack's mother. The two outside could peep under the drawn shade and watch all that went on, Jack quivering with emotion as he looked on the beloved faces of his own people once again.

Beverly knew how eager the boy must be, and hence he lost little time in getting down to the main fact, which was that he wished them not to do anything to arouse curiosity in the neighborhood; but that Jack was near by, and all would be soon explained; also that they must not be troubled thinking he, Jack, had done anything really wrong.

When he had drawn down the shades fully, that being the signal to those outside, Jack could restrain himself no longer. Opening the front door he rushed into the house and quickly had his mother and then his aunt in his arms.

The story was told at length, with the family clustered around Jack and Tom, hanging on every word as though it were the most thrilling thing they had ever heard, which in truth it must be.

Then Tom had to be considered. Lieutenant Beverly volunteered to go over to the Raymond house, which could easily be pointed out to him, and bring back the startled family, so they could greet their boy, whom they, of course, sup-

posed to be at that very moment still overseas, risking his life in his perilous calling.

It seemed to Tom that the delight of once more greeting these loved ones well repaid him for all he had passed through in making that wonderful flight. The story had to be all gone over again, and scores of questions answered.

By degrees the scope of Jack's plan was grasped by his family, who of course knew about the strange conditions of Joshua Kinkaid's will, whereby the bulk of his large estate, long before promised to the Parmlys, would go without restrictions to either Randolph Carringford or Jack Parmly, according to which of them, after the death of the testator, appeared before a notary public specified in Bridgeton, and qualified to assume the trust.

So, too, the plan of campaign designed to confound the arch-schemer who had even plotted to keep Jack from ever applying in person, was agreed to.

The presence of the three was to be kept a dead secret. They would not go out of the house by daylight, even for a breath of air. In the morning the old family lawyer, who had also served Mr. Kinkaid in a similar capacity, would be sent for to come hurriedly.

Once he arrived, the stage would be set for carrying out the provisions of the queer will,

which Tom considered might hardly have stood the test of a contest in court, though later on the lawyer, Mr. Smedley, who had himself carefully drawn it up, assured him it was really an iron-bound document.

"But," Jack said, as they waited for the lawyer's coming on the noon train from Richmond, "we can spare a couple of days here, and still make the steamer we hope to sail on for the other side. And it would be too bad if we missed seeing how dear Cousin Randolph takes his Waterloo."

Mr. Smedley arrived, and was astounded to see Jack. He showed that his sympathies were on the side of the Parmly family by his delight when shaking hands again and again.

Then the thrilling story was once more told, after he had been bound to secrecy. It would be hard to describe the emotions of the old lawyer as he sat and listened to what a great feat Jack and his two comrades had carried through.

After that all arrangements were made, and the lawyer decided to stay to see the thing through. It was the most astonishing event in all his life, he assured the company, and not for a fortune would he miss the scene that must accompany the coming of Randolph Carringford.

Mr. Smedley also sent a long telegram to that friend of Colin Beverly's who lived on Staten

Island. Later that same day a reply was received promising to carry out faithfully the instructions given, if he had to sit up all night keeping watch on all vessels arriving, though if port rules were rigorously carried out no steamer would be allowed to enter or leave except by daylight.

"But we know that isn't the case," Tom said, "because those troop ships have left New York under cover of darkness many a time. Still, the ships may have waited down the bay until morning, and then sailed."

That day passed, and the following night. Early on the morning of the third day after Jack's arrival home came a telegram to Mr. Smedley.

"Now for news!" cried Jack, as it was opened.

The message was brief and to the point, affording them all the intelligence they required.

"*La Bretagne* at Quarantine eleven to-night; expected to dock in two hours!"

CHAPTER XXV

TO SEE THE WAR THROUGH—CONCLUSION

"Rap-rap-rap!"

It was just at two that afternoon, and the train from Richmond had arrived ten minutes previously. Those within had seen a station hack deposit some one at the Parmly gate.

Mrs. Parmly herself answered the summons, the colored servants having been given an unexpected but welcome holiday when they appeared for work that same morning, in order to keep them from making discoveries.

"Good afternoon, Aunt," said the smooth-tongued visitor, starting to enter without waiting for an invitation. "I learned after getting to Richmond this morning that Mr. Smedley had come out to visit you; an occurrence which makes it convenient for me."

When he entered the sitting-room he found only Jack's aunt and the lawyer there, Jack and Tom and Lieutenant Beverly being in an adjoining room, but with the connecting door ajar, so

they could catch every word spoken and enjoy the dramatic situation to the utmost, being ready to step in when the crisis arrived.

Carringford proceeded to shake hands with the lawyer, after greeting Mrs. Parmly effusively. There was a smile as of triumph on his sallow face.

"Glad to find you here in Bridgeton, Mr. Smedley," Randolph again said, his voice like oil and his manner confident and condescending. "I received the notification from you when over in France working in a secret capacity for the Government."

"Yes," remarked the lawyer, "I sent both out as required."

"Must say," continued Carringford, "I wasn't much surprised, because I always knew Uncle Joshua to be a queer old duck. Realizing that unless I got a move on me and beat Cousin Jack home I'd stand to lose out in the game I managed to get passage on the *La Bretagne,* of the French Line. Docked at one last night, couldn't get a train till morning; but here I am, sir, ready to convince you that, being the first on the ground, my claim is perfectly valid."

He evidently expected that his coming would have produced something akin to consternation in the Parmly family, and must have wondered how they could meet bitter disappointment with such smiling faces.

"You have made very good time in crossing, Randolph," remarked the lawyer calmly, "considering the tempestuous times, and need of caution on account of the U-boats. I should say that the French steamer surpassed her record."

"And that being the case," resumed the other, smiling still as a winner at the races might do when handed his stake ten times multiplied, "since I'm here on the ground first, and you are the lawyer in the matter, what's to hinder our completing the formalities necessary to put me in possession of my great uncle's estate, according to his last will and testament?"

"The only stumbling-block that I'm aware of, Randolph," said Mr. Smedley suavely, "is a little matter of priority."

"But I am the first to appear before you, Mr. Smedley, and there were but two contestants for the property. Isn't that true?" demanded the newcomer, frowning at the thought that some unexpected legal tangle was about to appear.

"You are perfectly right in one thing, Randolph," continued the lawyer. "The race was to be between you and Jack. I must say you have made very good time getting over here. But in spite of your speed, Randolph, you are showing up somewhat late. In fact, the affair is all over, and I have started proceedings looking to conveying the property to the one undoubtedly presenting the prior claim."

The other was thunderstruck.

"Impossible, I tell you, Smedley!" he burst out. "With my own eyes I saw Jack Parmly over there at the front in France when I hurried to the port to embark on *La Bretagne*. He was not aboard that ship, I can take my oath, and another couldn't arrive in New York for days. So you have no other resource but to admit my claim to be just, and hand over what belongs to me. I demand it, sir."

"Not so fast, Randolph," begged the lawyer. "A little more moderation. You have made some sort of miscalculation I fear."

With these words he stamped his foot. Recognizing the signal, Jack stepped blithely into the sitting-room, followed by Tom and Beverly. His appearance almost caused Carringford to "have a fit," as Jack afterwards described the effect of his coming on the scene.

"What does this mystery mean?" he managed to gasp.

"Only that I took a notion to come home and claim that legacy left by our eccentric Uncle Joshua," Jack told him, with a shrug of his shoulders, as though miracles were an every-day occurrence with him.

"But I certainly saw you again and again, and heard you talk at the same time just before I left for Havre to sail!" cried Randolph, nevertheless convinced that at least this was the real

flesh-and-blood Jack Parmly standing before him.

"Oh! did you?" remarked Jack, mockingly. "Perhaps it was a dream. Perhaps I had an understudy over there. Perhaps a whole lot of things. But the one positive fact about which there isn't any doubt is that I'm here ahead of you, and you've lost out in your game, that's all."

"But—it's impossible, incredible!" continued the other, hardly able yet to believe his own eyes.

"Still, you must admit that I'm Jack Parmly, and quite in the flesh, which after all is enough to settle the matter," he was calmly told. "My family here have received me as their own; and Mr. Smedley had no trouble in recognizing me. So perhaps you'd better be packing your grip again, Cousin Randolph, and returning to your secret Government duties over in France!"

"But—how could you have reached here so far ahead of me?" gritted the disgusted Randolph weakly.

"Please don't forget that I'm an aviator, and we fliers are able to put over all sorts of stunts these days," laughed Jack; though his manner implied that he might be joking when saying this. At any rate, it could not enter the mind of any one to believe such a thing as flying across the Atlantic within the bounds of reason.

Carringford of course saw that his room was more desired than his company. Besides, he had not heart or desire to linger any longer, since he had received such a staggering blow.

Accordingly he took his departure, and acted quite like a "bear with a sore head," as Jack described his ugly way of slamming the door and hurrying out to the station hack that had been all this while waiting for him at the gate.

Now that the one great object which Jack had in view was accomplished, he and the other two began to consider the best way in which they could return to France without attracting too much attention.

"I have a scheme that may work admirably," said Beverly. "And it happens that the boat my good old friend is master of is due to sail from New York the day after to-morrow. We'll go on that as stowaways."

Then, seeing the look of astonishment and also bewilderment that came into the faces of his hearers, he went on to explain further.

"Of course I don't use that word in the usual sense of getting aboard unknown to any of the officers, perhaps through the complicity of a member of the crew, and hiding ourselves among the cargo. Such stowaways are a scarcity nowadays, the peril of torpedoes having given them cold feet. But I believe I can fix it with my

friend the captain so that he'll allow us to remain aboard without our names appearing on the passenger list."

"Sounds good to me," asserted Jack, while Tom said thoughtfully:

"I suppose we could stick to our staterooms during the day, and only go on deck late at night, when nearly everybody was asleep. Like as not, there'd be quite a number of army officers aboard, so we mightn't be noticed if any one ran against us while taking the air at night."

Accordingly this plan was settled upon; and as they were not absolutely certain about the time of sailing, with much still to be done before that event took place, once again did Tom and Jack have to bid their relatives good-bye.

"It'll not be for so very long now, let's hope," said Tom's father, as he squeezed his son's hand at parting; "for Germany is on her last legs, and unless all signs fail the war must soon come to an end."

"Besides," added Lieutenant Beverly, "none of us is likely to try to repeat the little flight we just carried through. We feel as if we can rest on our well earned laurels."

"And it'll be some time, I firmly believe," said Mr. Raymond, "before your wonderful feat is duplicated, or even approached." But then, of course, he could not foresee how even before the

peace treaty had been signed a number of ambitious aviators would actually cross the Atlantic, one crew in a huge heavier-than-air machine, another in an American seaplane, and still a third aboard a mighty dirigible, making the passages with but a day or so intervening between flights.

When a certain steamship left New York harbor one morning soon afterwards three pairs of eyes took a parting look through a porthole in their united stateroom at the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island.

Of course the occupants of the stateroom were Tom and Jack and Colin. They had managed to interest the big-hearted captain in their scheme. He knew that he must not appear to be connected with such an escapade; but such was his admiration for their wonderful achievement, as well as his friendship for Lieutenant Beverly, that he readily consented to help them.

"And so here we are," Jack observed, after they had passed out from Sandy Hook and were heading across toward troubled Europe, "going back to duty, before our leave of absence will have expired, and the three weeks already nearly half over. Let's only hope we can slip into the traces as if nothing unusual had happened and that mad flight was only an aviator's day dream."

"It's a pleasure, too," added Tom reflectively,

with a glance at his chum, "to know that there are loyal hearts waiting to greet us again over there where the shells are bursting. For of course Nellie and Bessie, not to mention Harry Leroy, will be counting the days anxiously until we show up. Little do they suspect all we've been through; and we'll have to bind them to secrecy when taking them into the game."

"H'm!" chuckled Lieutenant Beverly, "perhaps there's a little Salvation Army lassie I, myself, will be glad to see again. Don't fancy you two have cornered the whole market of fine girls. There are others over there!"

So we will leave them, only hoping that at some other day we may once more meet Tom and Jack and Colin, and accompany them through other activities.

THE END